Sunshine State's **PMC Impact**

Newsletter from the Plant Materials Center, Brooksville, Florida June 1997

## Is Winter Better Than Summer?

What is the best season to plant native grasses in Florida? The FL PMC, in conjunction with the Florida Institute of Phosphate Research (FIPR), planted native grasses during the months of January and May of this year, to try and find answers to that question. Lopsided indiangrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*) and wiregrass *(Aristida stricta)* were planted in monoculture and as a mix on reclaimed mined land soils near Bartow. Seeding methods were broadcasting and drilling.

Seedling emergence for both species has been tremendous fiom the January planting. Cooler temperatures and a few timely winter rains appear to encourage healthy, vigorous plants, which are not plagued with as much weed competition. Will the summer planting do as well? We will keep you posted as evaluation results become available.

## Recognizing Our Customers

Field offices are our number one customer. We depend on them to assist us in making the plant materials program work. The mission of the program is to evaluate plants for identified conservation problems, select superior plants, develop technology in propagation and management of the species, transfer this technology to our customers and secure commercial sources for this material.

Often we have requested field office assistance to collect selected plant materials but, their greatest assistance comes fiom allowing us to supply them with vegetative plant materials or seed to aid in solving their customers conservation needs. Plant information developed by PMC's, whether from Florida or one of the other 25 plant materials centers, Universities or other agencies, are supplied to field offices and anyone requesting it.

The area served by the Florida PMC is Florida, the Caribbean area, coastal areas of Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina. It is important for PMC's to be aware of conservation problems in their service area, and how the plant materials program can assist the field offices and their customers. Communication of needs from the field provides the direction of the program.

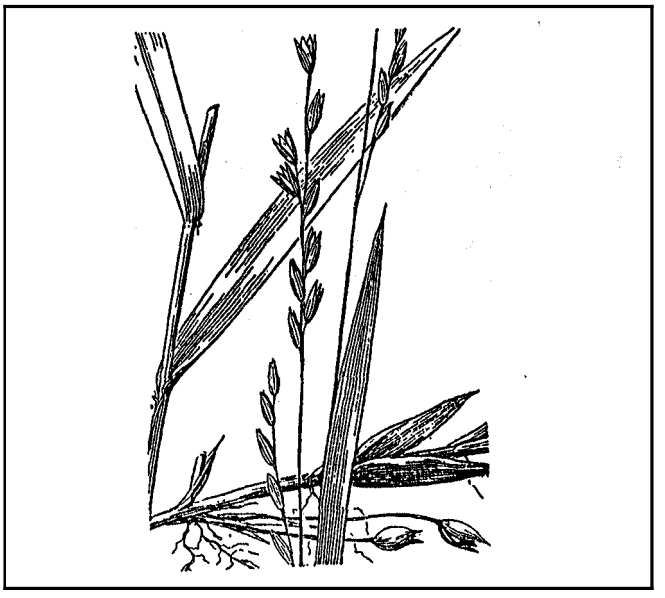
Services provided by a PMC are not always restricted to their service area. Recently we received a request for information from someone out of state, who visited the Center several years ago while still a college student. This person is now a soil conservationist with the NRCS in North Carolina. They remembered we had been working with gamagrass and several other forage grasses, and needed information on materials that could be used by ranchers in the NC area. We were pleased to be able to provide them with sources of seed suitable for that area.

## They Are Every Where!

There aren't many places you can go on the PMC without running into a planting of lopsided indiangrass or chalky bluestem *(Andropogon virginicus* var. *gluacus*). The 1996 collections of these two species were direct seeded in field plots in January. Early evaluation results have been impressive, with marked differences in performance between accessions. Several of the candidates have been very quick to establish healthy vigorous seedlings. Evaluations will continue for the next two years to select candidates for advanced evaluation.

## Plant Profile: Blue Maidencane

*Amphicarpum muhlenbergianum*



Blue maidencane - readily grazed by livestock and wildlife (especially during the drier winter season), has great potential for stabilizing disturbed sites and plays a critical role in maintaining and improving water quality. It is a native warm season perennial grass with a very extensive rhizomatous root system. It is found around ponds and sloughs throughout Florida and into parts of Southern Georgia. It can tolerate being flooded for short periods of time.

Plant height is 1 to 3 feet, with flat firm leaf blades 3 to 5 inches long, 1/4 to 1/2 inch wide, with whitish leaf margins and midrib distinctively offset. An open panicle seedhead, 2 to 4 inches long is produced in the fall however, the spikelets are sterile. This species does produce a fertile subterranean spikelet, somewhat like the "goobers" produced by peanuts.

Blue maidencane looks similar to common maidencane, torpedo grass and low panicum. However the offset midrib of the blue maidencane leaf can be used to distinguish it from other species.

The PMC is adding to an exiting collection of blue maidencane this year. If you know of any sites where this species is located, please notify the PMC staff. We will be mailing packets of collection information to all field offices this summer.

## New View Out State Office Windows

If you have been to the State Office lately you might have noticed a little color in the window boxes located on the front corners of the building. The PMC was requested to add plants to the boxes that would produce some color. The original sounds of disappointment by State Office staff has quickly changed to approval once the plants began to grow and produce their bright yellow blossoms. Numerous personnel have requested some of the waxie leaf perennial peanut that was chosen for these boxes, for use at their homes. As this demonstration shows, the perennial peanuts can also be used in flower boxes or as a hanging plant, and need not be considered just for forage or cover crop use.

If any of your soil and water conservation districts are looking for ways to raise additional funds they might consider growing the perennial peanut in pots or hanging baskets and sell them.