

TECHNICAL NOTES

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA

PLANT MATERIALS TECHNICAL NOTE NO. 21

Lablab (*Lablab purpureus*) for Conservation Use in Louisiana

Introduction

Lablab (*Lablab purpureus*) is a warm-season annual legume with high nutritive quality as a browse or forage for ruminant animals. Lablab is a member of the pea family and is commonly referred to as purple hyacinth bean, Egyptian bean, or field bean. Productivity of lablab varies under different rainfall conditions, soil types and times of seeding.

In 1819, seeds of lablab were planted in the Botanical Gardens in Sydney, Australia which eventually led to the first improved cultivar, 'Rongai' which was released in 1962. 'Rongai' seed was imported to the US in the late 1960s and marketed as supplemental forage for white-tailed deer. 'Rongai' is very late maturing and generally does not flower in the northern part of Louisiana before frost kills the plant.

In 2006, the 'Rio Verde' cultivar was developed by the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center. 'Rio Verde' was the first lablab cultivar developed in the US for tolerance to defoliation, forage production and seed production.

'Rio Verde' initiates flowering in late August with 50% bloom occurring about Sept. 1; the earliest mature seed are produced by Oct 15. In comparison, 'Rongai' lablab is very late flowering and generally does not flower in northeast Texas or northern Louisiana before frost.

'Rio Verde' is adapted to a variety of soils including sandy, sandy loam, clay loam and clay upland soils. It should only be planted on well drained sunny sites. It will not survive when planted on water logged soils.

In Louisiana 'Rio Verde' may be planted from April 1st up until August 1st. 'Rio Verde' will establish and survive with minimal rainfall during the growing season.



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Conservation Uses of Lablab

- **Wildlife Browse** – Lablab can be used extensively for wildlife food plots especially when targeting white-tailed deer. It has excellent nutritive value and palatability. Lablab may be direct sown in plots to be used as a browse crop, as hay for supplemental feeding, or as an attractant. In areas with high populations of deer, small food plot planting may need to be fenced to help protect plants from excessive defoliation. Lablab is commonly mixed with other warm and cool season legumes to provide yearlong forage for wildlife.

- **Livestock Grazing** – Lablab makes an excellent plant to incorporate into grazing systems. Its excellent nutritive value and palatability fits well with rotational grazing systems or planted for supplemental creep feeding area for small calves. Frequent and severe defoliation should be avoided which may result in loss of plants and/or stand. When using lablab in a rotational grazing system, terminate grazing when a 4-inch stubble height is reached. Grazing may resume when lablab reaches a 12 to 15-inch height. Grazing frequency will depend on moisture received during the growing season.

- **Hay Harvest** – Lablab is well adapted for planting and harvested as a hay crop. During the summer months lablab should make sufficient growth to provide 2 to 3 hay harvests if adequate moisture is available. Cutting height should be maintained at 4-inches or higher to allow for adequate regrowth. A cutter-conditioner would be the preferred method of hay harvest due to the stem size of lablab, however satisfactory hay can be made with cutting, tedding, windrowing, and baling. Hay should be stored in barns or under protective covers to maintain quality. Some leaf shattering will occur during hay feeding; thus, DM losses would be minimized by feeding in a bunk or with restricted access by livestock.

- **Cover Crop** – Lablab is well adapted for cover crops use or as a green manure crop. As a cover crop, lablab is adapted for summer fallow planting following a small grain crop, during the summer fallow period between sugar cane plantings, or as a traditional summer cover crop on fallow lands where cotton and corn are grown. When managed as a green manure crop. Lablab should be disked or incorporated at the end of the growing season to take advantage of maximum N-fixation. Lablab may be disked into the soil with or without shredding the plants. More than one disking may be required to adequately incorporate the above-ground biomass.

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