



Ebony Cowpea

Vigna unguiculata

Tropical



400mm+



4.0–7.0



Wide range types



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Ebony is a diploid, annual, forage cowpea with a spreading growth habit. It was selected as a superior forage or green manuring cowpea on the basis of its resistance to stem rot disease, growth habit, vigorous growth and good seed yield.

Ebony is resistant to races 3 and 4 of the severe root rot fungus, *Phytophthora vignae*. Meringa cowpeas are susceptible to both these races.

A distinguishing feature of Ebony cowpeas is the slight anthocyanin tinge along the length of their seed pod and the strong anthocyanin colouration of the tip of the pod.

Ebony was developed for use as a green manure crop in sugar cane growing areas and for use as a forage crop in tropical and sub tropical areas. Other features of Ebony include a long production season, increased dry matter production & improved return post-grazing. Ebony can be also sown into heavier soil types providing an alternative to Lablab. Ebony has good drought tolerance. Good tolerance to periods of heat and moisture stress. Best under warm, humid conditions, with temperatures between 20°C and 30°C.

Key features

- An extremely versatile summer forage providing good grazing, hay and silage options
- Prostrate growth habit that can withstand harder grazing
- Improved root and stem rot resistance
- Great source of nitrogen fixation in summer rotation
- Ideal for producing high quality summer finishing feed
- Nil prussic acid poisoning issues
- Suitable as a companion legume with millet and forage sorghum

Establishment

Sowing arrangement according to intended use: for fodder and green manure, 30–60 cm between rows and 10–15 cm between plants are suitable; required seeding rate about 20 kg/ha. Other seeding rates reported are 10–40 kg/ha when sown in rows and up to 90 kg/ha when broadcast. Most common 20–35 kg/ha. Sowing depth 3–5 cm. Seed is soft so germination is usually rapid if moisture and temperature are adequate. Promiscuous in its rhizobial requirements. Sow in spring to early autumn. Apply superphosphate as required by soil test. A small application of nitrogen (10 to 20kg N/ha) may give early assistance (not with seed). Fast establishment and speed to grazing.

Agronomy and management

Ebony is widely used in intercropping of the major African cereals; maize, sorghum and millet.

Planting Ebony cowpea with sorghum or millet as a combination crop can add some real benefits; adding nitrogen to the system for increased yield, while also providing a more balanced ration for grazing stock, and adding quality to hay and silage cuts through increased protein content.

Planting rates for the components of a combination crop should be 50–60% of the recommended rates for the individual varieties.

Ebony is very susceptible to frost. It grows well only in warm seasons with 25–35°C as optimum temperature. Grows from sea level up to 1,500 m asl, depending on latitude

When seasons are suitable and when sown relatively early, the best forage types will regrow after grazing. Grazing should be light to ensure that the plant frame is retained and damage is limited.

Performance

Vegetative dry matter production of 3–10 t/ha in 8–12 weeks; grain production 250–4,000 kg/ha.

Animal production

Ebony has high nutritive value. Crude protein in green foliage 14–21% and in crop residues 6–8%, in grain 18–26%; IVDMD of foliage >80%. IVDMD of residues after grain harvest 55–65%.

When fed as a supplement, 10–20% increase in milk yield (Colombia) and 50% higher animal live weight gain (67 g/day with sheep) are reported (West Africa).

Toxicity

Safe grazing, low bloat risk and nil prussic acid, can safely graze stressed crop. Cowpeas have been known to cause photosensitivity in young sheep.

Pest / disease resistance

Bear fly can attack late-sown crops in the two to three leaf stage. Heliothis can affect flowering and seed set. However, insects are not usually a problem.

Suggested sowing rate

Recommended planting rate for Ebony cowpea with AgriCOTE Pro-Tech is 20 – 35kg per hectare.



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