



# Iron Clay Cowpeas

Iron Clay Cowpeas are a vining summer annual legume, and the beans it produces are also known as black-eyed peas. In a straight stand, cowpeas form a dense weed suppressing mat and fix nitrogen.

For added soil building and diversity, plant in a mix with other summer annuals, such as sunn hemp, sudangrass, buckwheat, or MasterGraze tillering corn. The vining habit combines well with a more erect species that it can climb. Cowpeas are slower to start than many other summer annuals, and also do well in the shelter of a few quicker-establishing species. If planted in a mix with one of the above species, reduce the cowpea seeding rate slightly to 40-50 lbs. Plant millet or sudangrass at 12-15 lbs/A. The MasterGraze should be planted in 15 inch rows with a corn planter, and the cowpeas can then be drilled across the rows in a perpendicular direction.

Cowpeas have excellent drought resistance and a good tolerance of heat, low fertility, and a range of soils. They do well on light, sandy soils, and well-drained, but not excessively wet soil. If left to bloom, they attract many beneficial insects that prey on other pests.

Iron Clay Cowpeas reduce rootknot and soybean cyst nematode populations, making them a beneficial break crop in rotation.



Cowpeas growing in the lower levels in a summer cover crop mix with sunn hemp, sunflowers, and buckwheat

## At A Glance

- Warm season legume cover crop
- Fixes nitrogen
- Works well in mixes with summer annual grasses like sudangrass, millet, and MasterGraze corn
- Also known as black-eyed peas

## Best Uses

Summer cover crop, grazing, haylage, baleage,

## Establishment

**Planting Dates:** Late spring; plant when soils are 65 degrees and rising

**Seeding Rate:** 40-60 lbs/A (70-90 in northern areas or cooler, drier soils)

**Seeding Depth:** 1 1/2" - 2 1/4" deep

Summer Annual Cover Crop



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High Energy Forages and Soil Building Cover Crops



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Besides the flower nectaries, Iron Clay Cowpeas also have "Extrafloral nectaries" which are nectar release sites located on the petioles and leaflets that attract beneficial insects including ants, many types of predatory wasps, honeybees, lady bird beetles, and soft-winged flower beetles.

The cowpeas are tolerant of heat and drought and can be grown on poor soils. Due to the fact they are somewhat shade tolerant, they work well in cover crop mixes, growing under the canopy of the taller species.

Cowpeas grow a deep tap root that helps the plants find deeper soil moisture; in addition, it fixes nitrogen as a legume and it also scavenges phosphorous, bringing it upward into its above ground biomass for recycling and reuse by subsequent crops. The tap root system also helps build soil structure.

For nitrogen use, turn under as a green manure at flowering. As with many other cover crops, introducing a new species to the rotation will help break up weed, pest and disease cycles.

Cowpeas make an excellent high-protein forage, either alone or mixed with sudangrass or sorghum-sudan. The crop will be ready for forage in 45-50 days, will flower in 48-52 days, and has mature seed pods in about 100 days (the beans can be used for human consumption).

**Must be inoculated with N-Dure Peanut Inoculant for best nitrogen fixation. If cowpeas have not been grown in the field before, the soil likely won't have the correct strain of rhizobium bacteria in the soil for an advantageous inoculation.**



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