GREENLEAF DESMODIUM

Desmodium intortum — Factsheet

1. General Information

Scientific name	Desmodium intortum
Common names	Greenleaf Desmodium, Pega-pega, Beggarlice, Kuru vine, Amor seco
Family	Fabaceae (Legume family)
Native range	Mexico to Tropical South America
Growth habit	Trailing and scrambling subshrub; stems may reach up to 2 m and can root at the nodes

2. Botanical Characteristics

- Leaves: Three dark green, ovate leaflets, approximately 4 cm long, often with reddish-brown or purplish marks on the upper surface.
- Flowers: Small, under 1 cm, deep pink to lilac or violet; typically blooming in late May to early June in the southern hemisphere.
- Fruit/Pods: Narrow, segmented pods 2–5 cm long, covered in short hooked hairs that can stick to clothing and animal fur.
- Root system: Strong taproot providing some stability; the source notes it is less drought-tolerant than Silverleaf Desmodium (D. uncinatum).

3. Agricultural & Environmental Uses

Use	Description
Push-Pull Technology	A vital component in push-pull pest management. It is intercropped with maize or sorghum to repel stemborer moths (“push”) and suppress the parasitic weed Striga.
Livestock Feed	A protein-rich forage containing 12–21% crude protein, used for cattle, goats and chickens. It can be grazed or preserved as hay and silage.
Soil Improvement	As a nitrogen-fixing legume, it improves soil fertility and health; the source also notes increases in earthworm populations and soil aeration.
Weed Control	Its vigorous growth can smother competing weeds in plantations such as coffee and banana.

4. Cultivation Requirements

Factor	Requirement / information
Climate	Humid subtropics and upland tropics; 500–2500 m altitude; annual rainfall above 1,200 mm
Temperature	Optimum growth 25–30°C; susceptible to heavy frosts
Soil	Prefers fertile, well-drained soils, pH 5.0–7.0; can tolerate acidity down to pH 4.5
Propagation	Primarily by seed (1–2 kg/ha in mixtures) or stem cuttings
Management	Does not tolerate continuous heavy grazing; requires rotational grazing to allow bud sites to recover

5. Nutritive Value & Limitations

- Crude protein: 12–21%.
- Anti-nutrients: Contains condensed tannins, which the source says can slightly reduce digestibility (52–56%) compared with other tropical legumes.
- Invasiveness: In some regions, including Queensland, Australia, it has escaped cultivation and is regarded as an environmental weed in riparian areas.

6. Role in Sustainable Farming

Greenleaf Desmodium combines forage, soil-improvement and pest-management functions. In the uploaded Push & Pull reference, Desmodium is positioned between Elefant grass rows and crop rows, where it is described as repelling stemborers, Striga and army worm while attracting natural enemies. It is also regularly trimmed during weeding and used as fodder.

References in the supplied factsheet

- Tropical Forages: desmodium_intortum reference
- Feedipedia: Desmodium intortum reference