

Creeping saltbush (*Atriplex semibaccata*)

Long recognized as a valuable colonizer and soil stabilizer in disturbed environments, the potential for creeping saltbush as a desirable cover crop species in low rainfall vineyard environments has only recently been explored. Research has shown its compatibility with the vineyard ecosystem, providing benefits of perennial soil cover, habitat for beneficial invertebrate species, enhanced earthworm populations and cooler soil temperatures while not impacting significantly on vine production when grown in the warm inland regions.

Soil types

Creeping saltbush tolerates high levels of salinity and a range of soil types from clay to sandy loams.

Uses

Saltbush provides effective soil cover and shade plus beneficial insect habitat. Individual plants may extend to 1.5 metres in diameter and 15 cm in height, providing rapid cover and weed suppression.

Cultural practices

Creeping saltbush seed is contained within bracts to form a fruit. The bracts often contain germination inhibitors which prevent the seed germinating prematurely. Debracting the seed improves germination, but is not done commercially. As the seed has a light requirement for germination seed needs to either be sown on the soil surface or primed with the plant hormone gibberellic acid. Surface seeding can leave the fruit prone to harvesting by ants. Seeding rates will depend on seed quality and germination rates, but are usually about 5kg/ha. Clean dry seed can be planted through a conventional seeder during the late winter / early spring period. Seedling growth is slow during the cool months but increases dramatically in spring.

Once established creeping saltbush only requires an occasional mowing or grazing to top tall growing weeds.



Atriplex semibaccata (creeping saltbush) providing a dense mat on the soil surface at Mystic Park, Swan Hill, Victoria.

Further reading

Penfold C (2010) Should I try saltbush for a cover crop? *Australian and New Zealand Grapegrower and Winemaker*(January).

Lazarou J (2010) 'Trialling saltbush in mid-rows.' Available at <http://new.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/farmview-videos>

http://www.florabank.org.au/lucid/key/Species%20Navigator/Media/Html/Atriplex_semibaccata.htm