

DESMODIUM OVALIFOLIUM AS A COVER CROP FOR TEA

By

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Mr. Fernando's article in the *Tea Quarterly* for June, 1951 prompts me to give a short report on the planting of *Desmodium ovalifolium* in a new clearing of tea. In 1948 Mr. C. C. Barry, Keragala Estate, Kuruwita, (Ratnapura District) planted a new clearing of 10 acres on very steep ground at a height of about 600 feet. At the same time as the tea-seed was planted, cuttings of *Desmodium ovalifolium* were put in alternate rows; these spread rapidly and within two years formed a thick mat throughout the field. The creeper did not interfere in any way with the growth of the young plants, but gave them excellent protection especially in the drought early in 1949, when the earth beneath the creeper could be found cool and moist.

Once the *Desmodium* was well established, weed-growth and soil-wash were negligible, and by 1950 there was a field of strong and healthy plants with a very small percentage of losses. By comparison, in 1949 another clearing on adjacent ground was planted with *Indigofera endecaphylla*; this had a tendency to smother the young plants, but did not check weeds effectively.

In 1950 the *Desmodium* was uprooted in alternate rows and forked in as green manure; it was intended to uproot the other rows in 1951 but, the estate having been sold meanwhile, I do not know if that plan was carried out. This was intended to check any possibility of the creeper getting out of control, but I do not think it would have done so once the plants were tall and beginning to spread. In some old tea-fields on Keragala *Desmodium ovalifolium* had been planted as a cover crop, but it could not compete in anyway with a heavy cover of mature tea. *Indigofera*, on the other hand, could be a nuisance as it tended to grow up through the bushes.