

Q: I need to plant groundcover for erosion control on a south-facing hillside. I can get irrigation to the plants, but would like them to be drought tolerant. We also have deer. What kind of plants would you recommend?

A: There are a number of plants that you might consider. 'Groundcover' is a generally descriptive term, and can refer to plants that only grow a few centimeters high to those that grow a meter or more. The deer may be your biggest handicap, as there are few plants that they cannot consume. Deer tend to browse rather than eat an entire plant, but they can make establishment difficult.

Erosion control is achieved by plants with roots that grow deeply into the soil, but roots can only grow where there is readily available water and oxygen. If your slope has outcroppings of sandstone or rock, very little will grow on it, but neither will erosion be an issue. You will need to have an irrigation system installed, preferably a drip-system or low-flow system. A drip system will ensure that water gets to the plant roots, not to surrounding weeds, and is not lost to run-off or to evaporation. You will also want to mulch the hillside after planting with 6-10 cm. of shredded mulch that will stay in place. This will help with weed control and with moisture retention. You may need erosion netting as well.

The following are a few plants that you might consider:

*Artemisia spp.* These plants have fragrant silver foliage, grow about 30cm (1-2') in height, and are deer and drought tolerant. A few varieties that you might want to look at include: *Artemisia californica*, *A. douglasiana*, *a. tridentata*.

*Baccharis pilularis* Dwarf Coyote Bush. This evergreen mat-forming native does best if cut back every couple of years. Blooms with small white blossoms in the late spring,

*Heteromeles arbutifolia* Toyon: This is a larger, 1-2M (3-7') shrub with evergreen leaves, white blossoms and red fall berries.

*Salvia sonomensis 'Dara's Choice'* This plant has fragrant, gray-green textured foliage, hugs the ground, tends not to be eaten by deer, and is drought tolerant once established. Steel-blue flowers bloom in the late spring.

*Santolina chamaecyparissus* Fine, blue-gray fragrant foliage and small yellow button blossoms in summer. Drought and deer tolerant.

