

Question:

I have a slope that has caused an erosion problem and I am looking for a quick spreading ground cover that won't climb the trees.

Answer:

Most landscapes have difficult sites, such as hot, dry, erosion prone slopes or ditches where soil moisture fluctuates from very wet to very dry. Not many plants tolerate these conditions, but Creeping Raspberry, *Rubus pentalobus*, is one that will. In fact, it not only survives, it thrives under harsh growing conditions.

Creeping Raspberry is a fast-growing, evergreen ground cover imported from Taiwan. It grows 3 to 6 inches tall and spreads 3 to 6 feet in all directions. As the name implies, Creeping Raspberry creeps along the ground by forming runners – much like strawberries – which root at their nodes and establish new colonies. Although it is aggressive, Creeping Raspberry is not normally considered an invasive plant. Also, it doesn't climb trees or smother nearby shrubs, and it can readily be controlled with mechanical edging. Creeping Raspberry has coarse-textured leaves with deep veins that make them appear puckered. The leaves are about one and a half inches in diameter and have three to five lobes. During spring and summer, the leaves are shiny, dark green above and gray-green below. They turn burgundy in fall and winter to give it a pleasing fall color. White flowers are borne in mid-summer, but they are lost in the foliage and not very showy. The flowers are followed by tiny, raspberry-like fruit in late summer. Although the fruit are tasty and edible, they are tiny, so don't expect an abundant harvest for your breakfast table. Fruiting is not one of the plant's outstanding attributes.

Plant Creeping Raspberry plants 4 to 6 feet apart to allow them plenty of room to spread. A full-sun site is best although plants will adapt to partial shade. Avoid planting them in wet soils or areas that may get too much irrigation. Wet soils or overhead irrigation will cause the plants to look ragged.

Creeping Raspberry does well in most areas of Alabama except in the extreme northeast corner of the state where winter hardiness may be a problem. It has excellent pest resistance and deer tolerance. If, after a harsh winter, the foliage looks a little rough, give it a light trimming with the lawn mower or weed eater in mid-March to encourage a new growth flush in spring.

To encourage rapid establishment, apply a granular fertilizer in early spring. Apply fertilizer when the foliage is dry, and use a broom or rake to remove excess granules from the leaves. Creeping Raspberry can be propagated by separating a rooted runner from the mother plant. It is not just for ditches or slopes. Creeping Raspberry looks particularly nice when grown in a raised bed or planter and allowed to cascade over a wall or container. Once you have some established you will have plenty to share or to move to other trouble areas.

If you have garden questions call to speak with a Master Gardener at 1-877-252-GROW