Mythbusters!

A. Agapanthus

Agapanthus get used a lot on banks and slopes—but their reputation as a "slope stabiliser" is a bit overstated. Here's the real picture.

Root system – what it's actually like:
Type: Thick, fleshy, fibrous roots (not deep taproots)
Depth: Typically 200–400 mm deep, occasionally a bit more in loose soil
Spread: Forms dense clumps that slowly expand outward (can get quite wide over time)
Density: High root mass near the surface, forming a mat-like structure

Think of them as a shallow, dense net, not deep anchors.

How well do they stabilise slopes?
Where they do help:
Surface erosion control: Very good at stopping soil being washed away by rain
Topsoil binding: Their dense roots hold the top layer together
Low-maintenance cover: Hardy, drought-tolerant, and suppress weeds

Where they don't help much:
Deep slope stability: They don't anchor into subsoil, so won't prevent slips or slumping
Steep or unstable banks: Limited effect on anything structurally at risk
Heavy or saturated soils: In clay or wet conditions, their shallow roots won't stop movement

They only stabilise the top layer of soil, not the underlying structure.

If a slope is prone to slipping (e.g. after heavy rain), agapanthus won't stop that.

Use agapanthus if:

- **The slope is already stable**
- **You want to prevent surface erosion**
- **It's a low to moderate incline**
- **You want something tough and low-care**

Consider other plants or engineering solutions if:

- **The slope is steep or failing**
- **There's water runoff or drainage issues**
- **You need deep root reinforcement**

Agapanthus are good for erosion control, not true stabilisation. They're helpful as part of a planting mix, but not something to rely on if the slope has real movement risk.

It's also categorised as a noxious weed in some areas of NZ – so use with caution.