

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

DESCRIPTION:

English ivy is a member of the Ginseng (Araliaceae) family from Europe which was imported to North America for ornamental use. Typically English ivy gets out of control in garden situations and then is very difficult to eradicate. In urban environments it can cause damage to stonework and brick walls. When it escapes into natural areas English Ivy can develop “Ivy Deserts” a spreading monoculture which wipes-out the ground layer plants in a forest and eventually climb into the canopy and kill trees. Even if it appears to be contained on your property the seeds can be long distances by birds which allows them to invade natural area.

-3
Aggressive
Weed

IDENTIFICATION:

This ground covering or climbing woody vine attaches itself to surfaces using small adhesive roots. When they spread over the ground they sink tap roots into the soil which makes removal difficult. The robust and glossy leaves are evergreen and thus can be used to identify the plant even in winter. The shape of these dark green leaves is similar to that of a maple leaf and they have distinctive pale creamy or white veins radiating out from the leaf stalk in a palmate arrangement. With over 400 cultivars of this species, its appearance and ecological impacts can be somewhat variable.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Uprooting plants by hand is effective for small populations. Follow the vines to a root, then carefully pull at the root, with the goal of removing as much of it as possible. Repeated treatments will be needed as the plant will resprout from root fragments remaining in the ground. If soil disturbance is not a concern, the plants can be dug out. Though this requires more work, it improves success, especially with more established infestation.

Chemical/Mechanical: The thick waxy cuticle that covers the leaves will repel most water-based herbicides. Most common herbicides will need to be used multiple times for any effect, or may not work at all. Adding relatively high volumes of strong surfactants (such as methylated soybean oil) to a water-based mix of triclopyr (Garlon®) should increase penetration. Alternately, use an oil soluble herbicide such as triclopyr (Garlon® 4, etc.) mixed with mineral oil, though this mix will result in significant residual damage and a long wait period before the area can be replanted. We recommend the strongest concentration recommended on the product label.

Because English ivy stays green year-round it is a good candidate for dormant season herbiciding which avoids damage to surrounding vegetation. Spray the plants on sunny days in late fall, winter or early spring. It must be relatively warm (preferably 40 F or warmer) so that the periwinkle is actively photosynthesizing, but at a time of year when neighboring plants are dormant.

This plant often grows in heavy shade where native plants have a hard time competing. Thinning the overstory to increase light levels to the ground will help in re-establishing desirable vegetation.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is an attractive native vine with red-orange berries that provide mid-winter color and wildlife food. Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and Wild Grape (*Vitis riparia*) are fairly aggressive native vines that can provide a ground cover and a “green wall” covering for fences and other structures. Both species have attractive fall foliage and produce berries that feed songbirds and other wildlife.

For ground covers in shade, look to wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) or Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*). Virginia Waterleaf can be somewhat aggressive, so it is best used in contained locations. Overall, a diverse mix of native perennials is the best replacement for a patch of English Ivy.

