

Lily-of-the-Valley (*Convallaria majalis*)

DESCRIPTION:

This Eurasian member of the Lily family (Liliaceae) is a perennial which is often planted as a ground cover in shade to semi-shade areas. The erect, paired basal leaves have smooth margins and parallel veins typical of lilies, growing up to 10" in height in dense colonies. In spring a nodding flower spike develops up to 6" in height, holding six to twelve downward pointing flowers. Later in the growing season these flowers will develop into red berries up to 1/3" across. It spreads by underground rhizomes, forming dense monocultures which will spread and displace other plants. Due to its aggressive nature, many gardeners eventually regret planting lily-of-the-valley. If it escapes into natural areas it can slowly but steadily eradicate native species. Furthermore, all parts of the plants are poisonous if ingested, posing a risk to children and pets. Though this species has practical uses as a heart medicine, and many people find the fragrance of its flowers alluring, its invasive nature makes it inappropriate for home gardens.

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Aggressive
Weed

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Digging and removing the roots of this plant is the most effective organic control method, and this is best done when the soil is moist. This may be done most easily by running a flat bladed shovel through the soil below the root level and then sifting through the uprooted mass to remove the entire plant. The plants should then be disposed of properly. Repeated treatments will be needed as it will re-sprout from any root fragments that might remain.

Smothering may be the easiest organic method of control for larger monocultures. This can be done in early spring as the plants begin to sprout, or as late as early summer. Be sure to cut mature plants to the ground level before smothering. Lay down a tarp, old carpet, landscaping cloth, cardboard, or 8 to 10 layers of damp newspapers over the entire plant colony. Then cover this material with a thick layer of mulch, soil or gravel, and leave this covering in place for one full growing season. If you use paper or cardboard with mulch for smothering you can later install new plants into this already-prepared planting bed.

Chemical: Application of a glyphosate-based herbicide (RoundUp®, etc.) will control lily of the valley, although several applications may be necessary. The best times to spray the plants are early in the spring when the leaves are still tender and while the plants are flowering.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Canada Mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*) is a native with similar appearance, in fact it is sometimes called Wild Lily-of-the-Valley. It is less aggressive than Lily-of-the-Valley and though it will spread, the colony will not be as dense. This species prefers rich, shaded sites. Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) and False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum* and *M. stellatum*) are not ground covers but are instead taller (1-3 feet), shade tolerant members of the lily family that also have parallel veined leaves, and creamy white flowers followed by berries which provide food for wildlife. Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*) is a native groundcover which can be fairly aggressive in a garden setting, so it is best to plant it in an area where it can be contained. Great Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum appendiculatum*) is similar, though rarer in the wild, less aggressive, and less commonly available for sale. Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) is another excellent native ground cover for shady areas.

