

Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)

DESCRIPTION:

Originally from Europe, periwinkle, which is also known as vinca, is an evergreen perennial vine in the dogbane family (Apocynaceae) that grows in shade. It is a creeping groundcover that grows no more than 6" in height. The leaves are arranged opposite to each other on the stem or in whorles and are roughly ovular in shape with smooth margins and a rounded point at the tip. The leaves are about 1.5" long and less than 1" wide and are noticeably thick, stiff and glossy with a dark green color. The plant contains a milky latex which can be observed when you remove a leaf. In spring it can produce large purple flowers with five petals that are similar in appearance to phlox or petunia.

Though initially charming, this plant will spread aggressively, displacing and excluding other plants. Its semi-woody stems spread across the ground surface rooting at intervals along the stem, forming a dense mat of stems and leaves above ground and many rootlets from which plants can resprout. It is difficult to eradicate because its weak stems often snap before the root can be removed, making hand weeding difficult and a thick waxy cuticle layer on the leaves reduces the effectiveness of most herbicides.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Follow the stems to where they root, then carefully pull or dig the root out of the ground along with the rest of the plant. This method is very labor intensive for large colonies. Organic herbicides such as Nature's Revenge and Phydura may be effective at top-killing this plant by breaking down its cuticle layer, though repeat applications will be necessary. Prescribed burns will also have a negative impact on this species, but repeated burns over several years will likely be necessary for control.

Chemical: The thick waxy cuticle that covers the leaves of periwinkle will repel most water-based herbicides. Most common herbicides will need to be used multiple times for any effect. Instead, use an oil soluble herbicide such as triclopyr (Garlon® 4, etc.) mixed with mineral oil. We recommend the strongest concentration recommended on the product label.

Because periwinkle 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.

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



NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*) and Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) are both great native ground covers for shady areas. Great Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum appendiculatum*) is similar to Virginia Waterleaf, though rarer in the wild, less aggressive, and less commonly available for sale. No native plants have dark, glossy foliage like periwinkle. American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) has somewhat similar vegetation but it tends to climb. Look to Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) or Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) for attractive, low growing, pale-purple flowers in shady spots.



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