

DIRTY DOZEN DOSSIER:

ENGLISH IVY



English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) bedecks our kitchen wallpaper, artificial flower arrangements and evokes romantic images of cozy cottages with ivy-covered walls. Now picture ivy choking majestic trees, slowly but surely encircling the trunks and either blocking out photosynthesis for a slow death or weighing them down and making them susceptible to blowing down in winter for a quick death. English ivy is not native to the US and has run rampant, escaping yards and taking over forests and natural areas.

These vines make it difficult for new tree seedlings to grow because vines like English ivy provide such a tight layer that sunlight cannot even get through. On the ground, ivy creates a dense mat that chokes out native ground cover. As native plants are displaced, animal populations that rely on the plants for food and shelter also decline. English ivy also serves as a reservoir for Bacterial Leaf Scorch (*Xylella fastidiosa*), a plant pathogen that is harmful to elms, oaks, maples and other native plants and provides habitat for undesirable animals like rats. And, while English ivy is the cheap solution for slope control, it will not stay put and will travel until it finds upright structures like trees and shrubs which are far better at holding soil and preventing erosion.



English ivy spreads locally through vegetative growth and new plants can grow from cut or broken pieces of stems that are able to root in the soil. It disperses longer distances via seed which is carried to new areas by berry-eating birds including the Cedar Waxwing, Robin, Mockingbird, European Starling, and House Sparrow.

Controlling

Systemic herbicides like triclopyr (e.g., Garlon® 3A and Garlon® 4) and glyphosate (e.g., Accord®, Glypro®, Rodeo®) are absorbed into plant tissues and carried to the roots, killing the entire plant within about a week. The ever-green nature of English ivy means that it continues to grow through the winter months although at a slower rate. Herbicides can be applied at any time of year as long as temperatures are above 55 or 60 degrees Fahrenheit for several days and rain is not expected for at least 24 hours. Fall and winter applications will avoid or minimize impacts to native plants and animals. Repeated treatments will most likely be needed. Follow-up monitoring should be conducted to ensure effective control.

Vines growing as groundcover can be pulled up by hand, with some difficulty, and left on-site or bagged and disposed of as trash. Always wear gloves and long sleeves to protect your skin from poison ivy and barbed or spined plants. For climbing vines, first cut the vines near the ground at a comfortable height to kill upper portions and relieve the tree canopy. A large screw driver or forked garden tool can be used to pry and snap the vines away from the tree trunks. Vines can be cut using a hand axe or pruning saw for larger vines or a pruning snips for smaller stems. Try to minimize damage to the bark of the host tree. Rooted portions will remain alive and should be pulled, repeatedly cut to the ground or treated with herbicide. Because cutting will likely result in vigorous regrowth, vigilance is required to ensure long term control.

Native Plant Alternatives

Many homeowners and landscapers turn to English ivy for erosion control without considering native alternatives like **Wild ginger**, **Allegheny spurge**; ferns like **Christmas fern**, **Northern maidenhair fern**, and **Cinnamon fern**, grasses like **River oats** and **Switch grass**; and sedges like **Allegheny sedge**. Native vines that are good replacements for English ivy include **Trumpet creeper**, **Virginia creeper**, **Passionflower vine**, **Dutchman's pipe**, and native **Wisteria**.



For more resources about invasive exotic plants, native plants of the southeast, and to join the Tennessee Valley Wild Ones, go to www.chattanoogaatives.blogspot.com