



University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
**Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange**

---

Home Garden, Lawn, and Landscape

UT Extension Publications

---

9-1-2009

## W231 English Ivy

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

Follow this and additional works at: [http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_agexgard](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_agexgard)

 Part of the [Plant Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

"W231 English Ivy," The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service, W231 09/09 10-0047, [http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_agexgard/66](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_agexgard/66)

The publications in this collection represent the historical publishing record of the UT Agricultural Experiment Station and do not necessarily reflect current scientific knowledge or recommendations. Current information about UT Ag Research can be found at the [UT Ag Research website](#).

This Lawn Management - Insects, Weeds and Diseases is brought to you for free and open access by the UT Extension Publications at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Home Garden, Lawn, and Landscape by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

# English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

*Becky Koepke-Hill, Extension Assistant, Plant Sciences*

*Greg Armel, Assistant Professor, Extension Weed Specialist for Invasive Weeds, Plant Sciences*



## Origin:

English ivy is native to Europe, from northeastern Ireland to southern Scandinavia, and south to Spain. It is also native in western Asia and northern Africa. English ivy arrived in North America as a landscape plant and escaped from those landscape settings into natural areas.

## Description:

This evergreen perennial vine can grow up to 90 feet with proper support. English ivy has two forms: juvenile and mature. Juvenile plants have leaves with three to five lobes and herbaceous stems or very thin woody stems. Mature plants have leaves with no lobes and thick woody stems, with a primary support-

ing stem containing hairs similar to poison ivy. The supporting stem grows up trees or walls. Most English ivy plants in landscapes are juvenile plants. Both mature and juvenile plants have leaves with smooth edges, which are dark green with white or pale green veins. Small, inconspicuous flowers appear in the fall on mature stems and produce dark blue to black fruits.

## Habitat:

English ivy grows in fields, hedgerows, woodlands, forest edges and upland areas. It does not thrive in wet or extremely moist areas, but will grow in a wide range of soil pH. New populations generally occur on land that has been disturbed by humans or natural occurrences.

## Environmental Impact:

English ivy grows into thick carpets on forest floors, crowding out native vegetation, and it is one of few exotic plants that can thrive in full, deep shade. When the ivy climbs trees, the foliage can weigh down the trees and cause them to break and fall, although this is rare on mature trees. Also, when mature English ivy reaches the upper canopy, it shades the leaves of the host tree, denying the tree the sunlight it needs for growth and nourishment. The ivy then receives enough sunlight to produce flowers and fruit. These seed-containing fruits are ingested by many species of birds, which spreads the English ivy seeds to surrounding areas.



When English ivy is grown around buildings and trained up walls, the rootlets that attach the plant to the wall retain moisture that contributes to the rotting of masonry and siding. The ivy also damages paint. Carpets of English ivy can house rats and slugs that can negatively impact surrounding vegetation. English ivy stems, leaves and berries are poisonous when ingested in large quantities, and severe skin irritation may occur when skin comes in contact with the sap. Symptoms of poisoning are hallucinations, convulsions, delirium, fever, stupor and rash.

## Control methods:

There are many ways to eliminate English ivy. Hand-pulling the vine does work, especially if the soil is moist. All of the plant material should be removed from the soil, as this species can regrow from any root or stem parts.

If the vine has grown up a tree, it is not necessary to climb up the tree to remove vegetation. Instead, cut the vine all around the tree at a comfortable height and pull the vine off the tree to the base. The vegetation left on the tree will eventually die. In large infestations, clear a 6-foot diameter swath around the tree to prevent any further spread.

Vines growing on the ground can be mowed low, then covered with 6 to 8 inches of mulch. Any escaped shoots must be killed as soon as possible with a foliar herbicide application. Foliar or cut-stump applications with 3 to 4 percent solution of triclopyr or 2 percent solution of glyphosate can control English ivy. Use of additional adjuvants or soaps is recommended, due to the waxy cuticle on the leaf surface of English ivy. These treatments may take multiple annual applications over multiple years to completely eradicate this species. Please visit:

<http://hortweeds.tennessee.edu/webapp/test/Default.aspx>  
for assistance in finding the appropriate herbicide product.



## Alternative plants:

Many native plants are available to plant instead of English ivy.

For groundcover replacement:

- blue phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)
- wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
- green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*)
- Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)
- northern maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*)
- northern lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*)

For vine replacement:

- trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*)
- Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
- passionflower vine (*Passiflora lutea*)

- moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*)
- crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*)
- virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*)

## References:

- Biggerstaff, Matthew S. and Christopher W. Beck. (2006). Effects of English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) on Seed Bank Formation and Germination. *Am. Midl. Nat.* 157:250–257. Accessed online April 6, 2009.  
[http://www.bioone.org/doi/pdf/10.1674/0003-0031\(2007\)157%5B250:EOEIH%5D2.0.CO%3B2](http://www.bioone.org/doi/pdf/10.1674/0003-0031(2007)157%5B250:EOEIH%5D2.0.CO%3B2)
- Curl, Herb. (2003). Invasive Species of the Month – English Ivy. *EarthCare*. Vol. 44 No. 9. Accessed online April 6, 2009.  
[http://www.seattleaudubon.org/sas/Portals/0/News/Newsletter\\_Earthcare\\_NW/03-Jun%20Part%204.pdf](http://www.seattleaudubon.org/sas/Portals/0/News/Newsletter_Earthcare_NW/03-Jun%20Part%204.pdf)
- Czarapata, Elizabeth J. *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
- Kaufman, Sylvan Ramsey and Wallace Kaufman. *Invasive Plants: Guide to Identification and the Impacts and Control of Common North American Species*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2007.
- Morisawa, T. (1999). *Hedera helix*, *Hedera canariensis* (English Ivy, Algerian Ivy). The Nature Conservancy. Accessed online December 12, 2008.  
<http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/hedehe1.html>
- Northwest Coalition for Alternatives for Pesticides. Controlling English Ivy. Accessed March 16, 2009.  
<http://www.pesticide.org/pubs/alts/ivy/englishivy.html>
- Russell, Alice B. (1997). *Poisonous Plants of North Carolina*. North Carolina State University. Accessed online April 6, 2009  
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/Hederhe.htm>
- Simon, Bridget. (2004). English ivy - *Hedera helix*. weed bulletin - King county noxious weed control program.  
<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/weeds/bmp.htm>
- Swearingen, J. (2008). Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group Least Wanted: English Ivy *Hedera helix* L. Ginseng family (Araliaceae). Accessed online December 12, 2008.  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/ALIEN/fact/hehe1.htm>

Visit the UT Extension Web site at  
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/>

W231 09/09 10-0047

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development.  
 University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating.  
 UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.