

Invasive Highlight: English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

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English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a shade tolerant, problematic, and highly invasive vine that was introduced to the US in the early 1700's. A member of the Ginseng family, it spreads rapidly on the forest floor, creating a dense monoculture which smothers native ground vegetation, and eventually begins to climb trees and shrubs. As it climbs, it covers areas where the tree/shrub could have leaves, reducing its ability to produce food for itself. It also adds significant weight and wind drag to the tree, making it more susceptible to storm damage.

English ivy has also been found to be a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch, a deadly disease to our native oaks, elms, sycamore, maple, and mulberry.

English ivy spreads by growth, seed, and inexplicably, is still sold in many garden stores and home centers. Although readily eaten by birds, the berries are mildly to moderately toxic to both birds and mammals and the foliage can cause contact dermatitis in some people, so gloves are recommended when handling.

This plant is difficult to control, and management is a labor-intensive effort. When young and small, the vine can be cut or pulled up by the roots and discarded. A forest floor matting can be frequently mowed to starve it out or cut back to the roots and aggressively treated as it resprouts. If there is a tree that has ivy just beginning to climb, individual vines can be either pulled off the tree or cut back. A tree that has sizable vines growing up the trunk may require hand saws or possibly even a small chainsaw to cut through the vine but extreme caution is needed to not damage the host tree. It is recommended that the vines growing above the cut line not be removed as they are tightly attached to the tree. Allow them to dry up and eventually break off.

Chemical control is limited to either the cut surface on the vine or to the sprouts after cutting. Glyphosate (41% or higher active ingredient) at a 4% solution applied in the spring when the foliage is new has been shown to be the most effective product. With a 41% AI product, that amounts to 5.1 ounces of product to 1 gallon of water. The RTU formulations are ineffective. Look for glyphosate only products (not as readily available as in times past) as added chemicals like diquat can "burn" the leaves off before the glyphosate has the necessary time to enter the plant. As the growing season progresses, a thick waxy cuticle covers the leaf which requires cutting the stem and allow the resprouting to be treated. A 2nd treatment is likely necessary 6 weeks after the 1st treatment. Cut surface treatments can be done with either full strength glyphosate or triclopyr and needs to be done soon after the vine is cut. Using products with triclopyr or 2,4-D needs minimal dosage since those materials don't tell the difference between English Ivy and the tree itself.

The best way to control English ivy is to keep it from ever getting established on your property. A yearly inspection of your land is crucial because once English ivy gains a foothold, it is a true pain in the pinfeathers to remove.

