



English ivy

Description:

English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a member of the ginseng family of plants (*Araliaceae*). It grows as a vine for up to ten years producing deeply lobed, alternating, waxy leaves with three to five points. When the plant is mature and ready to bear fruit, the leaves are only slightly lobed, if at all. Leaves are thick, waxy, shiny dark green and have distinct pale colored veins. Mature plants produce umbels (umbrella-shaped clusters) of greenish white flowers in the fall resulting in a deep purple, soft skinned, berry-like fruit in the spring. Each berry may contain up to three seeds that can be widely dispersed by birds.

Vine stems begin pale green and slender when growing along the ground and quickly become woody and stout on climbing vines. Stems produce rootlets that give the vine a hairy appearance and produce a sticky substance that allows the vine to cling to vertical surfaces. Vines can produce roots from each node, allowing it to re-establish itself from cut stems and pieces of stems left on the ground.

**Impacts:**

English ivy is an invasive vine in the Pacific Northwest. It grows so rapidly that it surrounds and covers many native plants so that sunlight doesn't reach them and they die. Once the vines create a thick mat across the ground, other plants have little chance to get re-established. On trees, the vines can cling to the trunk and branches and grow up and over a 90 foot tree. If left uncontrolled, the ivy will make the tree top-heavy, block out sunlight, and gradually branches will die and further weaken the tree.

**Control Options:**

Thurston County's integrated pest management emphasizes cultural, biological, and manual control methods to keep pests and vegetation problems low enough to prevent damage. When chemical control is considered, the least toxic product is recommended when no other control methods would be effective or practical.

Most infestations of English ivy can be effectively controlled using manual and cultural control options. Large areas covered in ivy may require the use of herbicide if time and resources are an issue.

► Cultural / Habitat

Do not intentionally plant English ivy in your landscape. This includes the varieties: *Hedera helix* 'Baltica', *Hedera helix* 'Pittsburgh', *Hedera helix* 'Star', and *Hedera hibernica* 'Hibernica'. Mulch over and replant bare areas where ivy has been removed.

► Manual / Mechanical

Hand pulling vines is very effective for controlling English ivy. The plant produces a sap that may irritate some people's skin, so wearing gloves and a long sleeved shirt is recommended. Whenever pulling or cutting vines, be careful to remove all stem fragments from the soil or they will root and start a new plant. Vines that have grown up trees or structures should be cut at an easily reached height (killing the portion above the cut) and, if possible, pulled down. Some vines may be too large to remove from trees, if so, make sure all cut sections are not in contact with soil and evaluate your tree (is it top heavy or diseased from the ivy?).

Removing large infestations along the ground will expose soil making it vulnerable to erosion, especially on steep banks. Replant areas where ground has been made bare with fast-growing native groundcover as soon as possible. Groundcover will help to keep the soil in place and will help minimize the establishment of other non-native plant species.

► Biological

There are currently no known biological controls for English ivy.



► **Chemical**

Contact herbicides kill the plant tissue it touches, and systemic herbicides are taken into the plant and transported throughout the plant to kill all the tissue. A systemic herbicide is recommended for control of English ivy because even small stem fragments left alive can root and start a new plant.

Glyphosate is an active ingredient in many systemic herbicide products that are effective in the control of English ivy. Application methods vary for the type and size of the infestation; foliar applications (spraying leaves and stems) are recommended for large ground infestations, basal bark applications (applying product to vine after removing some leaves and stems) work when upper portions of vines are inaccessible, and cut stem applications (applying directly onto cut vine stumps) are most effective when combined with manual removal of vines and plant fragments. Thurston County rates glyphosate products high in hazard for carcinogenic potential. The risk from spot spraying English ivy is considered low provided the applicator wears a long sleeved shirt, pants and chemically resistant gloves.

Timing

The best chemical control is achieved when temperatures are above 50° F for several days. However, winter may be the best time to apply an herbicide to minimize injury to surrounding plants and trees. Since ivy grows all year long, spraying an herbicide in the winter will effectively control them and will reduce the risk to other plants when they are typically dormant. Shielding or covering neighboring plants is always a good idea to protect them from herbicidal injury.

Pollinator Protection:

To minimize negative impacts to bees and other pollinators, treatment prior to blooming is recommended. Removal of flowers before treating can be option. If treatment must occur during blooming period, try to spray early or late in the day or on cloudy cool days.



READ AND FOLLOW ALL PESTICIDE LABEL DIRECTIONS AND RESTRICTIONS. Obey all label precautions, and wear all recommended personal protective equipment. Use of brand names does not connote endorsement and is for reference only; other products with the same active ingredients may be available under other names. Pesticide product registration is renewed annually and product names and formulations may vary form year to year.

REFERENCES:

United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Forest Help Staff, Newtown Square, PA. Weed of the Week; English Ivy, *Hedera helix* L. Invasive Plants website: http://www.na.fs.fed.us/thp/invasive_plants. Invasive.org. English Ivy – Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests – A Field Guide for Identification and Control. November 05, 2003. Invasive.org is a joint project of The Bugwood Network, USDA, and the University of Georgia. National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Plant Conservation Alliance’s Alien Plant Working Group – Least Wanted. English Ivy *Hedera helix* L. Ginseng family (*Araliaceae*). June 27, 2006. King County, Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources Division, Noxious Weed Program. English ivy – *Hedera helix*. June 2002.



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