

English Ivy



Figure 1. English ivy, a vine, grows on the ground.



Figure 2. English ivy also climbs trees.



Figure 3. English ivy plant with juvenile leaves.

Problems Caused

English ivy (*Hedera helix* L.) is a perennial trailing or climbing vine native to Europe. It has been cultivated since ancient times. It has been used as a ground and wall cover in landscapes, as a houseplant, and as greenery in floral arrangements. There are many cultivated forms of English ivy. The wild form has two leaf types: juvenile leaves, which are typically trailing, and adult leaves, which are typically flowering and hanging from trees. It can be problematic in all Midsouth states and is still sold in the nursery trade. Most cultivated forms are not invasive, but the typical wild form tends to be most prevalent where once planted, especially on old home sites. Although flowering can occur if plants are allowed to climb, juvenile forms are most common. English ivy can cause gastrointestinal poisoning in livestock.

Regulations

English ivy is not regulated in the Midsouth.

Description

Vegetative Growth

English ivy is a woody evergreen trailing (**Figure 1**) or climbing (**Figure 2**) vine. Vines may reach 90 feet when climbing, but on-the-ground plants are 6–8 inches tall. Trailing plants typically root at the nodes, although climbing plants attach by root-like holdfasts. Stems are

hairless with simple, alternate leaves that may have star-like hairs on the petioles and lower leaf surfaces. Juvenile leaves are 1.5–4 inches long with three to five lobes (**Figure 3**). Leaves are dark green above, often with whitish veins, and lighter below. Adult leaves are entire, egg-shaped to triangular, and rounded to wedge-shaped at the base.

Flowering

Flowers are perfect and appear from June to October on adult vines. Flowers are hairy in globular terminal clusters that arise from a common point. Sepals are obscure; petals are thick, greenish-yellow, and $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch long. The fruit is a black, fleshy berry, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch across. Fruit contain two to five seeds that mature from April to May. Fruits may be poisonous. Seeds are just smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long and are apparently viable only when extracted from the fruit.

Dispersal

English ivy is primarily dispersed vegetatively by humans, either as an ornamental or through movement of soil.

Habitat

English ivy is a problem in fence rows, forests, disturbed areas, waste places, and open woodlands (**Figure 1**). It can form a dense groundcover, replacing the

surrounding native vegetation. English ivy is hardy at least from Zones 4 to 9.

Distribution

English ivy is widespread in the United States but apparently not escaped in certain northern plains states. It has escaped in all southeastern states but is generally localized around old home sites. Once planted, it may persist for years, continually growing out from the original planting. It is still sold and may cause problems in landscapes. English ivy has escaped in all five Midsouth states.

Control Methods

Biological

None known.

Chemical

Known chemical controls for English ivy (**Table 1**) are limited. They include glyphosate (Roundup, Glyphos, Accord; 41 percent acid equivalent per gallon formulation) at 2 percent solution and triclopyr (Garlon, Remedy, Trycera, Triclopyr, Turflon; 4 lb acid equivalent per gallon formulation) at 2.5 percent solution. Control is generally slow, and symptoms may not be evident for some period following application. Add nonionic surfactant to triclopyr and any glyphosate product that the label requires.

Mechanical

Small patches of English ivy may be removed by hand. Stems on the ground may root along the stem, making removal more difficult. Stems climbing trees can be cut near the ground and either left on the tree or removed from the tree. Mechanical control can be labor-intensive and slow.

Cultural

Cultural controls are not effective for English ivy because it grows in a wide range of environmental conditions.

Table 1. Chemical control for English ivy.

| Herbicide | Formulation | Method | Rate |
|------------|--------------------------------------|--------|---------------|
| Glyphosate | Roundup, Accord, etc. 3 lb ae/gal | Foliar | 2% solution |
| Triclopyr | Garlon, Trycera, etc. 4 lb ae/gal | Foliar | 2.5% solution |

References

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More Information

Worldwide, there are from 4 to 11 species of English ivy, occurring from Europe to the Mediterranean region to East Asia. The genus *Hedera* is not native to the United States, although several plants are referred to as "ivy." Dirr (1998) lists two additional species in cultivation: *Hedera canariensis* Willd. (Algerian ivy) and *H. colchica* Koch (Colchis ivy). Both tend to have larger leaves, and Algerian ivy has limited hardiness in the Midsouth.

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