

English Ivy (*Hedera helix* L.)

Victor Maddox, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Associate, Mississippi State University
Randy Westbrook, Ph.D., Invasive Species Specialist, U.S. Geological Survey
John D. Byrd, Jr., Ph.D., Extension/Research Professor, Mississippi State University



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

Fig. 2. English ivy also climbs trees.

Fig. 3. English ivy plant with juvenile leaves.

Introduction

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, a houseplant, and greenery in floral arrangements. There are many cultivated forms of English Ivy and the wild form has two leaf types: Juvenile leaves, typically trailing, and adult leaves, typically flowering and hanging from trees. It can be problematic in all Mid-South states and still sold in many forms within the nursery trade. However, most cultivated forms are not a problem and the typical wild form tends to be most prevalent where once planted, especially 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

It is a "B" designated weed in Oregon and certain cultivars are Class C noxious weeds in Washington, but not regulated in the Mid-South.

Description

Vegetative Growth

English ivy is a woody evergreen trailing (Figure 1) or climbing vine (Figure 2). Vines may reach 90 feet when climbing, but ground plants are 6 to 8 inches. Trailing plants typically root at the nodes although climbing plants attach by root-like holdfasts. Stems are glabrous with simple, alternate, leaves which may have stellate hairs on the petiole and lower leaf surface. Juvenile leaves are 1.5 to 4 inches long and have three to five lobes (Figure 3). Leaves are dark green above, often with whitish veins, and lighter below. Adult leaves are ovate to rhombic, entire, and rounded to cuneate at base.

Flowering

Flowers are perfect and born from June to October on adult vines. Flowers are pubescent in terminal, globose, umbels. Sepals are obscure; petals are thick, greenish yellow, and 1/16 to 1/8 inch long. The fruit is a berry-like, black drupe, 1/4 inch across. Fruit contain 2 to 5 seeds, maturing from April to May. Fruits may be poisonous. Seeds are viable, just less than 1/4 inch long, and apparently only viable when extracted from the fruit.

Dispersal

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

Spread By

English ivy is spread primarily by humans.

Habitat

English ivy is a problem in fence rows, forest, 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 Zone 4 to 9.

Distribution

US

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.

Mid-South

English ivy has escaped in all five Mid-South states.

Control Methods

Biological

No biological controls are widely used for English ivy control. English ivy seems to have few pests in the United States.

Chemical

There are a limited number of chemical controls for English ivy (Table 1). These include 2,4-D (1 qt per acre), glyphosate (2% solution) and triclopyr (2.5% solution). Control is generally slow and symptoms may not be evident for some period following application.

Mechanical

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

Physical

Physical controls are not generally utilized for English ivy. English ivy grows in a wide range of environmental conditions making physical controls difficult.

Herbicide	Method	Rate per acre
2,4-D	Foliar spray (multiple applications)	1.0 quart
glyphosate	Foliar spray	2% solution
triclopyr	Foliar spray	2.5% solution

Chemical methods for controlling English Ivy.

References

- Dirr, Michael A. 1998. Manual of woody landscape plants: Their identification, ornamental characteristics, culture, propagation, and uses, 5th ed. Stipes Publishing LLC., Champaign, IL.
- Knight, A.P., and R.G. Walter. 2001. A guide to plant poisoning of animals in North America. Teton NewMedia, Jackson, WY.
- Miller, James H. 2003. Nonnative invasive plants of southern forests: A field guide for identification and control. Southern Research Station, Asheville, NC.
- USDA, NRCS. 2007. The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 6 August 2007). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

More Information

The Genus *Hedera* belongs to the *Aralia* (*Araliaceae*) Family. Worldwide there is from 4 to 11 species, 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 Mid-South. Several botanical varieties of *Hedera helix* have been recognized, such as var. *cavendishii* Paul, *hibernica* Jaeg., *poetica* West., *conglomerata* Rehd., *erecta* Schulze, and *pedata* Rehd. Many variations occur, including variegation.

Victor Maddox, Ph.D.
Mississippi State University, Geosystems Research Institute
Box 9555, Mississippi State, MS 39762-9555
Ph. (662)325-2313, vmaddox@gri.msstate.edu www.gri.msstate.edu.

