



# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## English Ivy

*Hedera helix*



Chuck Barger, University of Georgia  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Background:

English ivy was probably first introduced into the United States by early European settlers for ornamental purposes. It continues to be a popular groundcover and vine due to its fast-growing, ever-green, pest-free and cold-hardy nature.

### Range:

English ivy is native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. In the United States, it is now established mainly in the east, south and along the West Coast.

### Description:

English ivy is an evergreen climbing vine with waxy, dark green leaves and conspicuous white veins. It attaches to surfaces by aerial rootlets. In sufficient light, terminal clusters of yellow-green flowers are produced in the fall. The black-purple fruits persist through the winter if not eaten by wildlife.



Forest & Kim Starr, Starr Environmental  
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### Habitat:

This invasive vine infests woodlands, forest edges, fields, hedgerows and coastal areas; however, it does not grow well in extremely wet locations. It tolerates a wide range of soil pH, but prefers slightly acid soils. It is often associated with habitat disturbances and old home sites.

### Biology and Spread:

Frugivorous birds are important seed dispersers of English ivy, transporting the vine to new areas over long distances. This vine also spreads through vegetative growth and can form new plants via broken pieces of stem that manage to root in the soil.

### Ecological Threat:

Both a climbing vine and a groundcover, English ivy impacts all structural levels of ecosystems. As it climbs trees in search of light, it kills branches by covering leaves and preventing photosynthesis. Its sheer weight makes trees susceptible to blow-over during inclement weather. On the ground, it forms dense monocultures that exclude native plants. English ivy is also a reservoir for Bacterial Leaf Scorch (*Xylella fastidiosa*), a threat to native trees.



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## How to Control this Species:

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### Physical

Vines growing as a ground-cover can be pulled by hand, but not without difficulty. Another option is mulching, where the infestation is smothered under several inches of biodegradable plant material, such as wood chips. The mulch needs to stay in place for at least two growing seasons. Climbing vines may be severed near the ground in order to kill upper portions. Damage to the host tree's bark should be minimized if possible. Rooted portions of climbing vines should be pulled or treated with herbicide.

### Look-A-Likes:

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English ivy is sometimes confused with eastern poison-ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), especially in the winter, because both are robust vines with obvious aerial rootlets.



Charles T. Bryson, USDA ARS  
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### Chemical

A 25 percent solution of triclopyr or glyphosate mixed in water can be applied to freshly cut stumps. Products like Brush-B-Gone®, Brush Killer®, and Roundup Pro® Concentrate are effective. Alternatively, a 20 percent solution of triclopyr ester (Garlon® 4) mixed in basal oil may be applied to intact vine stems. Garlon 4 may also be applied to wet leaves. Herbicide applications can be made at any time of the year as long as temperatures are above 60° Fahrenheit and rain is not expected within 24 hours. Garlon 4 is very toxic to aquatic life and should not be used near water sources.

### References:

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*Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health:*  
<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3027>

*Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group:*  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/hehe1.htm>

### For More Information:

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*DCNR Invasive Species Site:* <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

*Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:*  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

*Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:*  
[http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)

## Native Alternatives:

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Many native groundcovers and vines are better options than English ivy.



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