

# Hedera helix

ENGLISH IVY

ENGLISH NAMES	English ivy, ivy
SCIENTIFIC NAME	Hedera helix
FAMILY	Araliaceae (Ginseng)

English ivy is an evergreen, climbing vine, widely used by landscapers and gardeners as a fast-growing, low-maintenance ground cover.



Photo Credit: WILLIE MACGILLIVRAY

## RANGE/KNOWN DISTRIBUTION

Native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa, English ivy is now found in most temperate areas of the world. It was introduced to North America as an ornamental plant, and occurs extensively in the Eastern and Western United States. In Canada, it is a significant invader in southwestern Ontario, and is wide-ranging in southern British Columbia throughout the Garry oak range and beyond.

## IMPACTS ON GARRY OAK AND ASSOCIATED ECOSYSTEMS

English ivy's dense growth and abundant leaves block sunlight from low-growing native plants, crowding them out and preventing germination of their seeds. Ivy may eventually create an 'ivy desert,' dominating and excluding most plants on the forest floor, and altering or eliminating habitat and food sources for many birds, mammals, butterflies, and other wildlife.

In its climbing form, English ivy may create a dense cover on the bark of trees, depriving the bark of normal contact with air and micro-organisms. The weight of the vine and leaves, together with moisture from rain and snowfalls, makes the tree top-heavy and prone to damage or blowdown during windstorms. Heavy ivy cover may reduce the tree's foliage and its capacity to photosynthesise, weakening or even killing it.

## FIELD DESCRIPTION

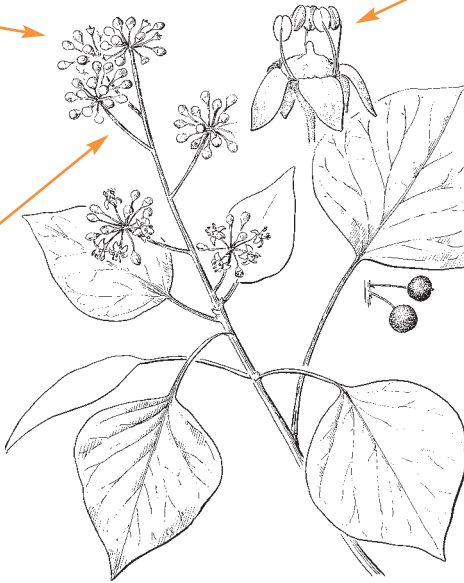
Ivy is an evergreen shrub that grows, with support, up to 30m tall. Ivy has dark green, waxy leaves arranged alternately along the stem. Juvenile leaves are commonly 3-lobed with a

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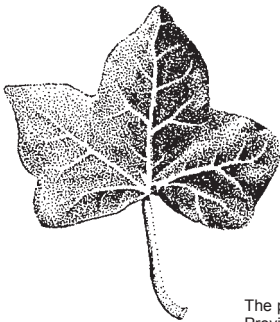
Fruit deep bluish-black, 6–9 mm, enclosing hard seed(s)

Flower greenish-white, 5–7 mm

Pedice  
(flower stem)  
5–15 mm



Adult leaves ovate, unlobed, 4–10 cm



Juvenile leaves triangular, deeply 3- to 5- lobed, 4–10 cm

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heart-shaped base, while adult leaves, or those in full sun, are often oval and unlobed with a wedge-shaped base. Small greenish-white flowers are borne on long pedicels (flower stems), becoming deep bluish-black fruits.

## LIFE HISTORY

Starting from a cutting or seed, ivy spreads rapidly—an average of 22 cm per month during the growing season. Roots growing into the soil and holdfasts adhering to hard surfaces provide stability during its juvenile phase, which lasts from several years to a decade or more.

Research indicates that ivy growing within two metres of a tree (or other vertical structure) will move towards and up the tree trunk. Stimulated by a vertical climb of several metres or more, ivy undergoes a dramatic change into its arborescens or adult form with a different leaf form and stem structure as well as the ability to produce flowers and fruit. The stem thickens with age. Flowers appear in fall if sufficient sunlight is available, with fruits maturing in spring.

The fruits are eaten by birds. Passage through the birds' digestive tracts scarifies the hard seed coat, increasing the seed's viability. Mild toxicity of the seeds discourages consumption of too many fruits at once, ensuring ivy seeds are dispersed over a wide area.

Ivy also spreads vegetatively, developing roots on advancing stems.

## HABITAT

Ivy grows readily in sunny and shady locations and in many types of soil, invading woodlands, forest edges, fields, stream banks, and coastal areas. Once established, it is somewhat drought tolerant, although it prefers moist soils. Ivy shows a

Develop a long-term, realistic program for invasive species removal before undertaking any work. Before taking action, expert advice should be obtained. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.

preference for incomplete tree canopy covers along forest edges, where the roots are moist but there is sufficient sunlight. It does less well in grasslands and other open areas, where the soil is too dry in summer months.

## MANAGEMENT

A combination of ivy removal from tree trunks (to remove the seed source) and the immediate area around the tree are the highest priority. It is also important to pull individual seedlings before they become established.

**PHYSICAL CONTROL:** Vines growing as groundcover can be hand-pulled, bagged and disposed of off-site. Use hand trowels to remove as much of the root system as possible, while minimising soil disturbance.

Vines growing up trees should be cut at about 1 m above ground level to kill the upper portions. The upper vines can be left to decay on the tree, or removed when brittle.

For more information contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the website at [www.goert.ca](http://www.goert.ca)