KING COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL PROGRAM WEED ALERT

English Ivy

Hedera helix — Ginseng Family

Non-Regulated Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Woody, evergreen perennial vine
- Two growth stages: juvenile and mature
- **Juvenile leaves** are dull green with distinct light veins, deeply lobed; stems produce roots at the nodes.
- **Mature leaves** are glossy green, not lobed; stems produce umbrella-like clusters of greenish flowers, followed by dark berry-like fruits
- Both juvenile and mature ivy have waxy leaves
- Older vines can reach over 90 feet long with stems one foot in diameter

Invasive cultivars of English ivy are extremely common in King County.

Juvenile ivy (top and right) has deeply lobed leaves.

Biology

- Climbing vines form small rootlets that have a glue-like substance that attaches to any surface
- Spreads vegetatively from stem and root fragments during the juvenile stage
- Once mature (after 10 years) also spreads by seeds that are found in berry-like fruits dispersed by birds
- Flowers in the fall, fruit matures in early spring
- Long-lived; one plant reported to be 400 years old

Mature ivy has fuller, glossy, unlobed leaves and produces clusters of black fruit.

Impacts

- In natural areas, it outcompetes natives and takes over the forest floor, the shrub layer and the canopy
- Adds substantial weight to trees, which can contribute to blowdowns
- Forms thick mats that can accelerate rot and deteriorate structures
- Takes water and nutrients away from other plants
- Provides hiding areas for rats and other vermin
- Entire plant contains slightly toxic compounds; sap can cause dermatitis and blistering in some people

Too much of a good thing: ivy is an aggressive climber and can topple or severely impact the growth of trees.

Distribution

- Found throughout King County; most abundant in urban and suburban forests, but also present in remote areas
- Can grow in a wide range of conditions, from relatively dry to moist soils and from full sun to shade

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program Line: **206-477-WEED**
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

King County

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling English ivy, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes four cultivars* sold as ornamental plants as invasive and is encouraging landowners to remove them when possible and to choose alternatives for their landscaping needs.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be employed throughout several growing seasons. When working in critical areas such as stream banks, care must be taken to minimize soil disturbance; any disturbed area must be stabilized to control erosion and sediment deposition.

Manual: For ivy growing on the ground, the most effective control method is pulling or digging out plants and removing the roots. Fall to spring is usually the best time for this since the ground is moist. Vines may re-root if left on soil, so pile them up or discard with yard waste. Since sap can cause a reaction in some people, gloves and protective clothing is recommended. **For ivy growing in trees**, the key is separating the climbing vines from their roots. Ivy can only grow from roots in soil (it cannot root itself to tree bark). Cut and remove all vines to a comfortable height around the trunk of the tree. This will kill the upper vines; the lower vines will need to be pried off the tree and pulled out of the ground. Try to minimize damage to tree bark. Mulch area afterward.

Smothering: Apply at least eight inches of mulch either directly over the ivy or cut and remove it before adding the mulch. Laying out cardboard before applying mulch will increase the effectiveness. Keep in place for at least two years before attempting to replant. This is not an option for steep slopes or areas where the mulch can be easily washed away.

Chemical: Foliar treatment is difficult due to the waxy coating on ivy leaves, so a good surfactant (spreader-sticker) is essential. Spray leaves with a 2 to 5 percent solution of either glyphosate or triclopyr combined with a non-ionic surfactant. The best time for herbicide application is from late summer to early spring. Repeat treatment may be needed. Winter spraying reduces damage to native plants that are dormant. It should be over 55 degrees for a few days with no rain expected for at least 24 hours. Leaves are most susceptible when they first appear, so very early spring treatment or cutting first and treating fresh re-growth may increase effectiveness. Cut stem application with triclopyr or glyphosate is effective as well and can be done late summer to early spring. Apply herbicide directly to freshly cut surfaces of living rooted stems using a spray bottle, sponge or brush. Amount of active ingredient varies by product so consult the label to find out what concentration to use for the cut stem method. Always follow all directions on the label when using any herbicide.

*Four cultivars of English ivy currently considered invasive are: *Hedera helix* 'Baltica'; *H. helix* 'Pittsburgh'; *H. helix* 'Star'; *H. hibernica*

Alternatives to English Ivy

Like the look and growing ease of English ivy, but don't want the invasive headaches? Want to do the right thing and remove the ivy growing in your yard but don't know what to plant in its place? The good news is there are several alternatives that provide the benefits of traditional English ivy without the drawbacks.

For evergreen foliage and mat-like spreading, consider kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*). This native groundcover grows in well drained sandy soils, likes sun and is drought tolerant once established.

Native kinnikinnick is a great alternative.

Another alternative is crinkle-leaf creeper (*Rubus pentalobis*). It forms a thick carpet of evergreen leaves; it works well for slopes and covers large spaces.

Other possibilities include beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*), fringe cup (*Tellima grandiflora*) and low Oregon grape (*Mahonia nervosa*).

For more alternatives, visit the Northwest Plant Guide at **www.kingcounty.gov/gonative**. This site offers many planting suggestions and gardening tips.