

Common Ivy*

Hedera helix Ginseng Family

Identification Tips

- Woody, evergreen, perennial vine, trailing or climbing
- **Leaves on non-flowering stems (juvenile stage):** dull green, lobed, with distinct light veins; stems produce roots at nodes; most common leaf type on plant
- **Leaves on flowering stems (mature stage):** glossy green, unlobed; stems produce umbrella-like clusters of greenish flowers, followed by dark berry-like fruits
- Ivy plants can have both juvenile and mature stems
- Vines typically grow 90 feet long with stems up to one foot in diameter; can grow up 300-foot trees.

Biology

Climbing vines form small rootlets that have a glue-like substance to attach to any surface. Spreads vegetatively via creeping stems and roots. Once mature, also spreads by bird-dispersed seeds found in berry-like fruits. Flowers in the fall; fruits mature in early spring. Roots are long and mostly creeping (usually 1-4 inches deep). Plants are long-lived, 50 to 100 years or more.

Impacts

Provides hiding places for rats and other vermin. In natural areas, crowds out native plants and takes over the forest floor. Adds substantial weight to trees, which can contribute to blowdowns. Forms thick mats that can accelerate rot and deteriorate structures. Shallow-rooted ivy mats on hillsides can increase risk of slope slippage. Entire plant contains somewhat toxic compounds; sap can cause rashes in some people.

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. Introduced from Western Europe as an ornamental plant.

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement to control common ivy, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board encourages landowners to remove it whenever possible and to choose noninvasive alternatives for their landscaping needs.

*Four cultivars of common ivy currently on the Washington State Noxious Weed List are: *Hedera helix* 'Baltica'; *H. helix* 'Pittsburgh'; *H. helix* 'Star'; *H. hibernica*

**Non-Regulated Class C
Noxious Weed: Control
Recommended**



Juvenile ivy leaves are dull green and deeply lobed, with distinct light veins.



Mature ivy stems have fuller, glossy, unlobed leaves and produce clusters of black fruit.



Ivy is an aggressive climber and can topple or severely impact the growth of trees.

Questions?

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

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be employed throughout several growing seasons. When working in critical areas such as streambanks, care must be taken to minimize soil disturbance. Any disturbed soil 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 because the ground is moist. Vines may reroot if left on soil, so pile them root-side up or discard them with yard waste. Since sap can cause a reaction in some people, gloves and long sleeves are 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 doesn't get nutrients from tree trunks). Cut and remove all vines to a comfortable height around the tree trunk. 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. Clear at least 3-6 feet around tree. Mulch area afterward.

Smothering:

Apply at least 8 inches of mulch directly over ivy, or cut and remove ivy before adding mulch. Lay out cardboard before applying mulch to increase effectiveness. Keep in place for at least 2 years before attempting to replant. This is not an option for steep slopes or areas where the mulch is easily washed away.

Chemical:

Follow all applicable laws and regulations regarding herbicide use on your site, and follow all directions on the label. Foliar treatment is difficult due to the waxy coating on ivy leaves. Use of a surfactant will improve results. Combining glyphosate and triclopyr is more effective than either herbicide alone. The best time for herbicide application on ivy seems to be late summer, although results vary. Repeat treatment may be needed. Winter spraying can reduce damage to dormant native plants (follow label instructions about weather requirements). Leaves are susceptible when they first appear, so early spring treatment or cutting followed by treating fresh regrowth can also work. Cut-stem application with triclopyr or glyphosate is another effective method. 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. For more information, contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

Alternatives to common ivy

Like the look and convenience of common ivy, but don't want the invasive headaches? Luckily, there are several noninvasive alternatives that provide the benefits of traditional common ivy—without the drawbacks.

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

Another alternative is **crinkle-leaf creeper (*Rubus pentalobus*)**. It forms a thick carpet of evergreen leaves. This plant covers large spaces and works well for slopes. It isn't native, but it's not invasive.

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

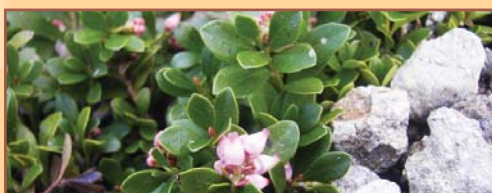
For more alternatives, visit the Northwest Plant Guide at kingcounty.gov/gonative.



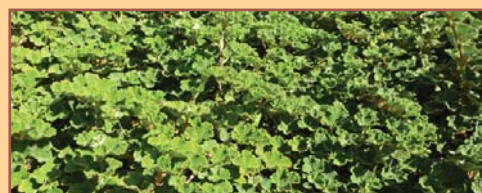
low Oregon grape



fringecup



kinnikinnik



crinkle-leaf creeper



beach strawberry