



Invasive Species

Leaflet



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Hedera helix (English Ivy)

Initial Introduction and Expansion in Range

Hedera helix is native to Europe and was probably brought to the United States by early settlers for use as an ornamental vine. The appealing, dark green, glossy leaves of this plant continue to make it a popular, low maintenance, evergreen groundcover. It is now found throughout eastern and southern states and is posing particularly damaging ecological impacts in Oregon and Washington.



Hedera helix is an interesting plant in that it has two distinct leaf shapes depending on its age and exposure to sun. As a groundcover, the leaves have three to five lobes (the most common). Mature plants in full sun that are ready to flower often have un-lobed, oval

leaves.

Description and Biology

- Evergreen, climbing, woody vine that also forms dense groundcovers.
- Vines attach to the bark of trees, brickwork, and other surfaces with small rootlets that produce a glue-like substance that aids in climbing.
- As a groundcover, stems are woody and slender. Climbing vines can reach several inches in diameter.
- Leaves are dark green with white veins, waxy to somewhat leathery, and arranged alternately along the stem. The most common leaf shape has three to five lobes, but does not have any lobes on mature vines.
- Small greenish-yellow flowers are produced on mature vines during the summer.
- Clusters of blackish-purple fruits may persist through the winter if not eaten by



birds.

Habitats Susceptible to Invasion

Hedera helix threatens both disturbed and undisturbed forests as a groundcover and climbing vine making this plant a particularly insidious enemy to natural areas. In addition to forming a thick mat along the forest floor, smothering native wildflowers and seedlings and preventing natural regeneration, vines that climb trees slowly kill them from base upwards.

Vigorously growing vines envelop the branches, preventing photosynthesis and causing upwardly migrating branch death. Eventually the entire tree will die. Trees heavily draped with vines are more susceptible to blowing over during storms, making them hazardous near homes, roads and public-use areas in parks.

Prevention and Control

Small infestations of *H. helix* can be pulled by hand. Monitor and remove any re-sprouts. Care should be taken to bag and remove the plants since pulled plants left on the ground can continue to grow.

Large infestations of *H. helix* will usually require a combination of cut stump and foliar herbicide treatments. Where vines have grown into the tree canopy, cut each stem as close to the ground as possible, then cut again a little higher up and remove the cut pieces. The top portion of the vine will eventually die, rot and fall off the tree. Treat the freshly cut surface of the rooted stem with a 50 percent solution of triclopyr.

Groundcovers of *H. helix* can be treated with a foliar solution of 4 percent glyphosate plus a 0.5 percent to 1 percent non-ionic surfactant or a 2 percent solution of triclopyr plus a 0.5 percent non-ionic surfactant to thoroughly wet all of the leaves.

Since *H. helix* is evergreen, it can be treated year round as long as temperatures are above 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit for several days. Repeated treatments will likely be necessary for complete control. As a general rule, solutions of glyphosate work best on *H. helix* in the spring and solutions of triclopyr work best in the summer and fall.

THE LABEL IS THE LAW!

WHEN USING ANY PESTICIDE, FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS

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Hedera helix photography by Johnny Randall, N.C. Botanical Garden (*left*) and Mike Kunz, N.C. Botanical Garden (*right*).

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