

INVASIVE OF THE MONTH

An olde English invader

From Brodhead Watershed Association



Photo cutline: Vole damage can result from allowing English ivy to surround the base of landscape trees. (Penn State photo)

Gardeners love plants that aren't fussy, look great year-round and don't cost a fortune. Plenty of native plants qualify. Unfortunately, when it comes to ground cover, English ivy is far more popular than it deserves to be.

That's because it is as aggressive as a disturbed mama bear.

English ivy is actually a strong, woody vine, even though most people use it as a ground cover. In practice, that means as soon as the ivy meets a vertical object — tree, pergola, fence post, stone wall, or house — it will start climbing.

Its powerful rootlets penetrate siding, brick, concrete, and stone, wrecking paint and breaking up the surface. The tiniest crevice offers an opening — sometimes it finds its way through chinks in window casings and foundations and actually grows into houses.

It escapes into the wild easily — and it is fast, growing up to 15 feet every year, strangling every desirable tree in its way. Though English ivy doesn't usually smother a tree's canopy, even very tall trees can be weakened when the ivy reduces trees' access to sunlight and air. Combined with the enormous weight of the heavy vines and leaves, trees are more likely to break or even be uprooted by windstorms, threatening homes and other structures.

If you've ever tried to clear established ivy that's grown up a tree, you know that "tenacious" is much too mild a word for this vine. And all that dense foliage is heaven-sent cover for insects, voles and other pests. A tree girdled by voles will quickly die.

ELIMINATING ENGLISH IVY

English ivy is tough to eradicate, but persistence over time can bring it under control. Penn State recommends applying glyphosate (such as Roundup and others) or triclopyr (Garlon). Young foliage is most susceptible, because the surface is less waxy. You can also cut the vine stems, and apply directly to the cut surface. Do this when the plant is growing vigorously, in spring and early summer.

The best idea? Don't plant it to begin with. But if you already have English ivy, commit to keeping it cut back from foundations, other structures, and trees.

For information: <https://extension.psu.edu/english-ivy-in-the-landscape>

More on invasive plants can be found at brodheadwatershed.org/invasive-species-management-plan/