English Ivy Control

English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is an evergreen vine that has been planted for many decades in South Carolina communities as a shade-loving groundcover. It is fast growing, drought tolerant, and generally maintenance free as it rarely has insect pest or disease problems. However, its mat-forming growth habit allows it to smother out perennials and smaller shrubs in the landscape.

Being a vine, English ivy has a tendency to climb anything it can for support, such as fences, homes or trees. This ivy is unique in its ability to attach to objects by the production of aerial rootlets from the stems that cement themselves to the object. On trees, English ivy travels quickly to the top in order to flower and set fruit. The fruit are eaten and disseminated by birds. Tree limbs that are covered with English ivy are often smothered as the dense ivy foliage covers the foliage of the tree.

If English ivy is allowed to grow up the side of a home, the attachment of the aerial rootlets can damage stucco, wood or the mortar of brick homes. The dense foliage makes for a haven for insects and small animals, and the shading may trap moisture that can cause damage from rot.
Although it may take a few years for a house to be engulfed with English ivy (*Hedera helix*), damage can occur where it does adhere to wood, stucco or mortar.

Many retail stores sell miniature-leafed or variegated ivies, which make for nice house plants. However, sometimes these plants are added to the landscape either intentionally, or by the containers being placed outside where the ivy grows beyond the container and takes root in the soil. Both the miniature-leafed and the variegated ivy cultivars are much slower growing plants. The problem that can arise from these plants is that when grown outside, sooner or later these cultivars with smaller, white or yellow leaves may revert back to the large-leafed, totally-green, and fast growing type of English ivy. The resulting larger-leafed, green vines will outgrow the more decorative cultivars that were originally planted, and they quickly get out of control.

**Cultural Control of English Ivy**

The first step is to sever the vines of the English ivy that have climbed trees in the landscape. The viney stems of the ivy are attached tightly and must be pried up from the trunk to be cut. A large flat-bladed screwdriver can lift and help make the vines easier to cut with pruners. Cut these vines several feet up the trunk at a height that is comfortable to attain. Then loosen the vines below these cuts and pull them downward from the trunk. Cut them off at the base of the tree.

Larger vines may require the use of a saw, but be careful not to damage the tree trunk. Removal of the vines can be done at any time of the year. The hotter and drier the weather, the faster the remaining sections of vines up the trunk will die.

English ivy on the ground is usually easier to pull up after rains have softened the soil. If pulling is done during the winter, any perennials in these beds are less apt to be damaged while they are dormant. The ivy stems are strong and not deeply-rooted; so long sections can be pulled up at a time. Be sure to wear a long-sleeved shirt and gloves, as the sap from English ivy may cause dermatitis on sensitive individuals.
Chemical Control of English Ivy

Herbicides may be required for the control of large areas of English ivy. The spring is the best time to apply an herbicide when 3 to 5 new leaves appear on the English ivy vines. This new growth does not yet have the waxy cuticle covering present on the older leaves, which allows for better penetration of herbicides. Alternatively, the English ivy can be mowed or cut back with a string trimmer. When new growth appears, herbicides can be sprayed. Mix and spray a 2 or 3% solution of glyphosate for best results. Always follow label directions for mixing, use and safety. Watch for new growth from areas missed or inadequately sprayed because of multiple layers of vines and foliage, and then repeat the application of glyphosate.

Glyphosate is a general, non-selective, systemic herbicide that has the least soil activity and is less harmful to the roots of nearby trees and shrubs than other herbicides. If desirable plants are in the beds, spraying may either be done before perennials appear in the spring, or individual plants may be covered with plant containers. Spray when temperatures are above 55 to 60 °F. Repeated treatments will probably be required. Do not allow spray to contact the foliage, stems, exposed roots, or the trunks of desirable shrubs or trees. A glyphosate solution may penetrate the bark of many landscape trees causing injury. Examples of products containing glyphosate are listed in Table 1.

Triclopyr is the active ingredient in many brands of brush killers and is a systemic, broadleaf plant herbicide that can be used for English ivy control. Apply a 2 to 5% triclopyr solution in the spring as new growth appears (3 to 5 new leaves per vine). Always follow label directions for mixing, use and safety. Watch for new growth from areas missed or inadequately sprayed because of multiple layers of vines and foliage, and then repeat the application of triclopyr.

Triclopyr may remain in the soil slightly longer than glyphosate, but if applied during moist and warm conditions, microbial degradation is much more rapid so that it is less apt to affect the roots of nearby desirable plants. Triclopyr is applied as a spray, but do not allow the spray to contact tree trunks or exposed tree roots. Do not apply triclopyr if air temperatures are higher than 85 °F, as there may be increased volatility of the sprayed product that might affect nearby broadleaf plants.

Caution: Pollinating insects, such as honey bees and bumblebees, can be adversely affected by the use of pesticides. Avoid the use of spray pesticides (both insecticides and fungicides), as well as soil-applied, systemic insecticides unless absolutely necessary. If spraying is required, always spray late in the evening to reduce the direct impact on pollinating insects. However, it is very important to always read and follow the label directions on each product. For more information, contact the Clemson Extension Home & Garden Information Center.
### Table 1. Herbicides for the Control of English Ivy in Residential Landscapes.

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<th>Active Ingredient</th>
<th>Examples of Brands</th>
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| **Glyphosate**    | Bonide KleenUp Weed & Grass Killer 41% Super Concentrate  
|                   | Gordon’s Pronto Big N’ Tuf 41% Glyphosate Weed & Grass Killer  
|                   | Gly Star Plus Glyphosate Herbicide (41%)  
|                   | Glypho-Max (41%)  
|                   | Hi Yield Super Concentrate Kill-Zall Weed & Grass Killer (41%)  
|                   | Hi-Yield Super Concentrate Kill-Zall II (41%)  
|                   | Martin’s Eraser Weed & Grass Killer Concentrate (41%)  
|                   | Monterey Remuda Full Strength (41%)  
|                   | Roundup Pro (41%)  
|                   | Southern Ag Weed Pro Glyphosate (41%)  
|                   | Surrender Brand Eraser Systemic Weed & Grass Killer (41%) |
| **Triclopyr**     | Bayer Advanced Brush Killer Concentrate (8.8%)  
|                   | Lilly Miller Blackberry & Brush Killer (8.0%)  
|                   | Ortho Max Poison Ivy & Tough Brush Killer Concentrate (8.0%)  
|                   | Southern Ag Brush Killer (8.8%)  
|                   | Hi-Yield Turflon Ester Ultra Herbicide (60.45%)  
|                   | Monterey Turflon Ester (61.6%) |

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