

# Climbing Euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*)



**Native range:** China

**Description:** Climbing euonymus (a.k.a. wintercreeper, Emerald'n Gold, and Gaiety) is an evergreen, clinging vine. It is shade tolerant and can form a dense groundcover or shrub to 3 feet in height. It also commonly climbs trees up to 70-foot high with the aid of aerial roots. Its dark green, shiny, egg-shaped leaves are 1 - 2 1/2 inches long with toothed margins and silvery veins. Clusters of small, non-showy green-white flowers are produced on a long stalk from June to July and are followed in the autumn by pinkish-red seed capsules that split open to expose orange seeds.

**Ecological Threat:** Climbing euonymus grows very fast and can outcompete native vegetation by depleting soil moisture and nutrients, blocking sunlight, and by forming a dense vegetative mat that impedes the growth of seedlings of native species. Vines on trees continue climbing and can eventually overtop them, covering the leaves and preventing photosynthesis.

**Methods of Reproduction and Dispersal:** Climbing euonymus most commonly escapes from neglected gardens by spreading shoots with small rootlets that allow it to establish new shrubs away from the mother plant. Its vines climb rocks, trees, and other supporting structures. Birds and other wildlife also eat the seeds and further disburse new plants.

**Manual and Mechanical Management Methods:** Climbing euonymus can be contained in the yard by regularly pruning hedges and shoots to prevent its spread into woodlands areas. In the wild, young plants can be hand-pulled when the soil is moist and root systems are small. Any portions of the root system remaining may resprout so complete removal is necessary. All plant parts including stem fragments and mature fruits should be bagged and disposed of in a trash dumpster to prevent reestablishment. For larger plants, cutting stems and treating cut area with targeted herbicide is very effective. Cutting without apply herbicide is not recommended to avoid root sprouting.

**Suggested Alternative Plants:** There are a variety of native creeping or climbing vines that make good alternatives for climbing euonymus. Some examples from the eastern U.S. include trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*), Dutchman's pipe (*Aristolochia macrophylla*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), and American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*), our only native wisteria.

*Source: Alien Plant Working Group, <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/factmain.htm>*