Invasive Plant Fact Sheet

English Ivy: The "green threat" in our community

English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a growing threat to the health and enjoyment of Greenbelt. The Board of Directors and Woodlands Committee request members' cooperation in controlling the spread of ivy in our yards, common areas, and woodlands.

English Ivy's Adverse Impact on Yards

Ivy causes damage to structures. Ivy vines will climb up and over fences, walls, sheds and other structures in your yard. Its fine hair-like roots will bore into wood and trap water promoting accelerated rot. Ivy will also form a thick mat against exterior walls encouraging moisture damage, mold, and insect and vermin nests.

Ivy out competes native plants. If left unchecked, ivy will overwhelm all other native plants from wildflowers to trees. A yard planted with ivy may soon become a yard carpeted by only ivy. Because it is evergreen it will grow year-round gaining advantage over other annual and perennial plants. Furthermore ivy's shallow root system does not stabilize slopes or stop erosion. By replacing native plants, ivy increases the risk of erosion on slopes and hillsides.

Ivy increases yard maintenance. Contrary to popular opinion, a thick mat of ivy will actually increase yard maintenance over time. In addition to the work of repairing damage to fences and structures, controlling ivy from killing trees in your yard and containing its rapid spread is much more work than a well tended native garden. Totally removing ivy from your yard, once complete, will decrease upkeep costs and time demands.

Ivy discourages popular wildlife. Since ivy provides poor habitat and little food source for most native wildlife a yard landscaped only with ivy will not attract a diversity of birds, butterflies, and helpful beneficial insects. Moreover, ivy berries provide little nutritional value for wildlife and are actually toxic to many varieties of songbirds.

Ivy encourages unwanted wildlife. Ivy's growth characteristics of a thick, nearly impenetrable mat of inter-twined vines provide refuge for vermin, especially rats who are protected from predators in the dense growth. Ivy also promotes shallow pools of water in its leaves that provide ideal breeding places for mosquitoes, carpenter ants, and termites.

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English Ivy's Adverse Impacts on Trees

Ivy engulfs entire trees. As ivy grows, it climbs up trees seeking the light it needs to mature and propagate. It will eventually cover the entire trunk and major branches. Mature ivy will also send out its own "branches" from the main body of its host tree that compete for light with the tree. The visual appearance will be of a large green blob rather than a healthy flowering and branching tree.

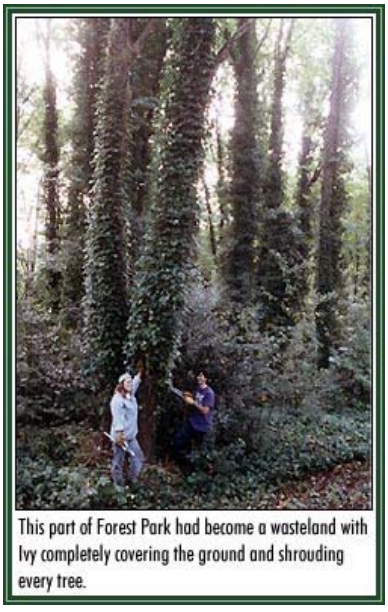
The 'green' you see is mature ivy - toppling the tree.

Ivy prevents natural fertilization cycles. Ivy competes with the trees, especially seedlings, for water and nutrients. The ivy growing around the base of a tree commonly destroys native deciduous plants that have a growth and decay cycle that replenishes the nutrients in the soil. Ivy also accelerates tree leaf decay for its own growth thus diminishing nutrient use by the tree.

Ivy weakens healthy trees. Ivy vines eventually grow into a dense mat on the tree's trunk, depriving the bark of the normal contact with air and microorganisms. Mature ivy grows in spiral pattern totally encompassing tree branches and leaves reducing the ability of the tree to perform photosynthesis. The host tree will experience biologic stress become more susceptible to microorganisms and pests that will hasten the demise of the tree.

Ivy increases tree "blow-downs." Ivy vines grow to a very large size - often four or more inches in less than 30 years. Vines have a very high water content thus adding considerable weight to the tree and limbs. The stiff, waxy characteristics of ivy leaves also hold water, ice, and snow that add further weight to the tree. Taken together with other weakening effects, ivy infested trees are much more susceptible to toppling in high winds and storms.

English Ivy's Adverse Impacts on Forests



This part of Forest Park had become a wasteland with Ivy completely covering the ground and shrouding every tree.

Ivy destroys forest canopy and increases invasive plant spread. Ivy systematically destroys mature trees leading opening of holes in the canopy. These unnatural "light gaps" change the forest environment increasing opportunities for other invasive plants such as multiflora rose, bush honeysuckle, and barberry.

Ivy replaces understory plants and drives out wildlife. Ivy's thick carpet effect overwhelms the herb and shrub layers of health forests. These layers are vital sources of food and shelter for wildlife. Their demise will reduce native wildlife present in the woodlands and decrease plant diversity.

Ivy disrupts the plant succession and forest growth. Healthy forests naturally regenerate themselves by seed. Ivy stunts this process by preventing natural growth of tree and shrub seedlings. A woodland setting dominated by an ivy understory will ultimately become only ivy as mature trees die with no replacements.

For More Information on English ivy visit www.ghi.coop/woodlands.htm *or* www.noivyleague.com