

## MYRTLE AND OTHER INVASIVE EVERGREEN GROUND-COVERS BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

Patches of myrtle (*Vinca minor*) grow almost everywhere in Beverly Shores. Also known as periwinkle, low-growing myrtle is easy to overlook. Due to its evergreen foliage, it becomes more visible after other plants drop their leaves. Myrtle at one time was extremely popular as a ground cover because it grows and spreads readily, even in heavy shade. It also has a sprinkling of pretty flowers in spring.

Myrtle was first introduced here as an ornamental from Europe in the 1700s. It has opposite, glossy, oval-shaped leaves. In the early spring, myrtle produces a violet or periwinkle-colored, 5-petal blossom. As the stem creeps along the ground, it sends out roots at the leaf nodes. If you are ever trying to pull myrtle up by its roots, it may seem that it has rooted for miles and miles, so long can the stems grow.



Like many of our fast-growing ornamentals, myrtle is a major problem in natural areas throughout the eastern United States. The Invasive Plant Species Assessment Working Group reports escaped populations of myrtle in every county in the state of Indiana. It can grow so densely that few native plants are able to compete with it. Since the Indiana Dunes area is renowned for its plant diversity, and because so many creatures, from insects to mammals, rely on these natives, we should do everything in our power to maintain this diversity, starting in our own backyards.

If you have myrtle and want to get rid of it, try digging or pulling it up. Though a time-consuming chore, it can be accomplished with perseverance. Otherwise, kill it with a Roundup or a glyphosate-containing herbicide. Because periwinkle's glossy leaves shed water, mow the plant down before applying the herbicide. Some repeat applications may be necessary. Remember to read and comply with all pesticide label directions.

There are a number of other evergreen ground-covers that are problems in some parts of the United States though not necessarily yet in the Indiana Dunes region. Think twice before incorporating them into your landscaping. Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*), like oriental bittersweet, can climb over trees and rocks and is very tolerant of a wide range of habitats. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is an aggressive spreader and difficult to combat, so much so that it can kill the trees that it entwines. Pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*) is a very tolerant evergreen ground creeper that spreads by rhizomes. All of these plants can be found growing in some part of Beverly Shores.

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for native replacements. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)) or Candice Smith ([candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com](mailto:candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com)) for assistance. Also please visit our website at [www.bserg.org](http://www.bserg.org) for further information on invasive plants and native replacements.

