

# GROUND COVERS TO AVOID: WINTERCREEPER AND ENGLISH IVY

BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

Many gardeners want easy-to-grow, evergreen ground covers to keep their garden attractive all year long. Unfortunately, the most widely used groundcovers are non-native species with very invasive tendencies. Wintercreeper and English ivy are very adaptable to woodlands and thus can readily move in and choke out native species. Both of these plants, in addition to periwinkle and pachysandra, have escaped populations in the Indiana Dunes region.

Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*) is a woody, trailing ground cover that sends out roots along its above-ground stems. It can also form a clinging vine by climbing trees with adhesive disks or a shrub. Wintercreeper superficially resembles periwinkle with opposite, glossy oval-shaped leaves. But wintercreeper leaves have small teeth on their margins while periwinkle leaves have smooth edges. Wintercreeper has been found to be invasive in natural areas in most of the eastern half of the United States and is easily disseminated because birds love its abundant, tasty seeds.



Wintercreeper



English Ivy

English ivy (*Hedera helix*), like wintercreeper, is a trailing and rooting ground cover and clinging vine. It is an aggressive invader in Indiana and much of the eastern and western United States. English Ivy can cover tree trunks and branches, easily growing 50 to 100 feet high, and block sunlight from their hosts' foliage. A tree covered with English Ivy will slowly decline and die over several years. The vine also makes the tree more likely to be blown down by high winds. In many natural areas English ivy has the reputation of creating "ivy deserts" devoid of native plants.

Both of these plants can be removed by pulling. If ivy is growing high up in a tree, the stems can be cut near the base and the remaining plant on the ground pulled. The vines in the tree will die and disappear over time. When pulling is not an option, these plants will respond by varying degrees to herbicide application. An herbicide containing glyphosate or triclopyr is most effective for foliar application or for applying to the cut off edge of the pruned plant. Be sure to follow all herbicide label directions as required by federal and state laws.

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for removal and for native replacements. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)), Candice Smith ([candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com](mailto:candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com)), or Bill Schaudt ([blschaudt2@gmail.com](mailto:blschaudt2@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.