

English ivy can be a challenge to remove



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Question: I moved into an older home with established landscaping. I have one very large tree with English ivy wrapped around the base and growing up into the canopy. While it is beautiful, I have a hunch that it is not good for the tree. How do I go about removing the English ivy?

Answer: Well, your hunch is correct. *Hedera helix*, commonly referred to as English ivy, is not beneficial for your tree.

English ivy climbs and smothers trees, makes the tree canopy heavier, and increases fire hazard. English ivy grows very well in western Oregon, and it is commonly found wrapping itself around tree trunks, climbing over fences or creeping up the side of a house. It is a vigorous, fast-growing, woody evergreen perennial that grows as a climbing vine or a trailing ground cover.

When the English ivy climbs up into a tree, it can grow up to 50-100 feet. When the English ivy gets up into the canopy of the tree, both the ivy and the tree are in competition for the same vital elements for survival: nutrients, water and sunlight.

The English ivy vines can get very heavy and may put your tree branches at a higher risk of breaking during a storm. Over time, English ivy will weaken the tree, making it a target for opportunistic insects. Also, English ivy is a favorite hiding place for mosquitoes, slugs,

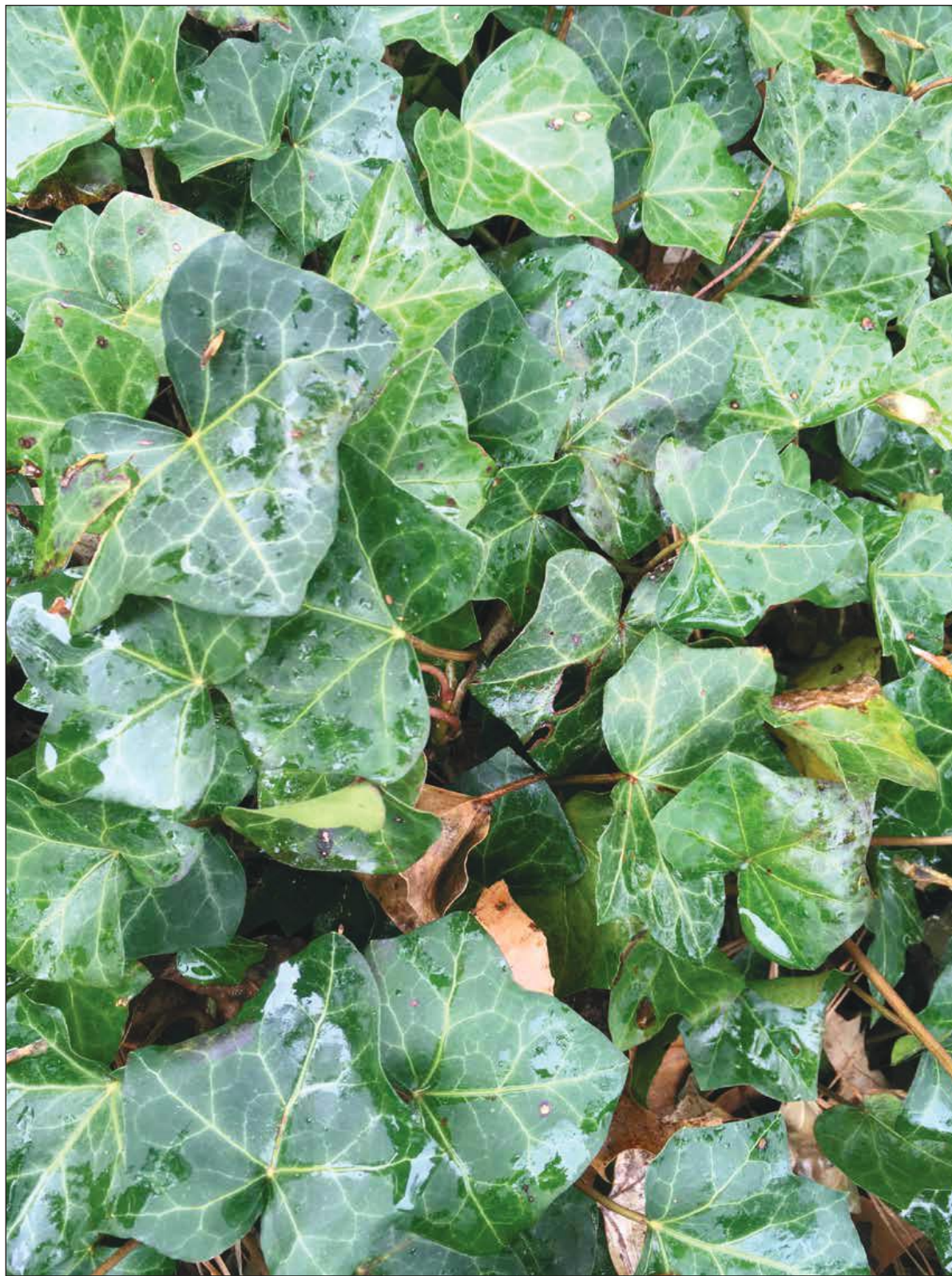


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English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is an evergreen, invasive, fast-growing, perennial vine.

snails, and rodents.

Getting rid of the English ivy is not an easy task. After all, it is considered an invasive plant in Oregon for a reason, and you will need lots of persistence to completely eradicate this plant.

First, water underneath the tree because it will be easier to remove the vines from soft soil. Next, use garden clippers to cut ivy stems from their roots around the bottom of the tree's trunk. Getting as deep

as you can, pull and dig the roots out. Cutting, pulling, and digging are hard work but this is the best way to permanently get rid of the English ivy.

The goal is to separate all the vines from their source of

nutrients causing them to die. Then cut the vines at about 4-5 feet up the tree removing only those sections. Remove those sections carefully to minimize damage to the tree bark.

Now, it may be extremely tempting to pull the vines off the trunk of the tree, but this can actually cause a lot of damage to the tree bark. As difficult as it may be, simply leave the vines on the tree and let them die naturally. The ivy vines will gradually blend into the tree bark after it is cut.

The reason you shouldn't just pull the vines off is because the ivy will be firmly hooked into the bark and by pulling the plant off, part of the bark will come off too and damage will result.

Check the tree frequently for at least the next year to make sure new ivy sprouts haven't started to take hold. If they have, repeat the above process.

I would like to give you a few words of caution. English ivy has been known to cause skin irritation so it may be a good idea to wear gloves, long sleeves and long pants when working around these plants. Also, ivy leaves are somewhat toxic to dogs, cats and goats.

And last, do not dispose of the English ivy in your compost pile. You will need to bag it up and throw it in the garbage. You have a big task in front of you, but with persistence, getting rid of English ivy can be accomplished.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.