

# English Ivy

VINES



***Hedera helix* L. HEHE**

**Plant.** Evergreen woody vine climbing to 90 feet (28 m) by clinging aerial roots and trailing to form dense ground cover. Thick dark-green leaves with whitish veins and three to five pointed lobes when juvenile. Maturing at about 10 years into erect plants or branches with unlobed leaves and terminal flower clusters that yield purplish berries. Toxic to humans when eaten and triggering dermatitis in sensitive individuals.

**Stem.** Woody slender vines when a ground cover and growing to 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter when climbing infested trees and rocks by many fine to stout aerial rootlets. Vines pale green (sometimes reddish tinged), rooting at nodes, becoming covered with gray-brown shiny bark, segmented by encircling and raised leaf scars, and roughened by tiny ridges. Bark light gray to brown, bumpy and gnarly, with aerial rootlets developing along the side where clinging to vertical structures. Aerial rootlets exuding a glue-like substance. Older vines sometimes grown together where crossed.

**Leaves.** Alternate, with shapes varying according to age—typical juvenile plants having three to five pointed lobes and mature plants broadly lanceolate and unlobed, 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long and 2.5 to 5 inches (6 to 12 cm) wide. Thick and waxy, smooth and hairless, dark green with whitish veins radiating from the petiole and pale green beneath. Petioles to 6 inches (15 cm) long, pale green and often reddish tinged.

**Flowers.** June to October. Terminal hairy-stemmed umbel clusters of small greenish-yellow flowers on mature plants. Five thick and pointed petals, 0.1 inch (3 mm) long. Each petal radiating from a five-sided domed green floral disk, 0.1 inch (3 mm) wide, tipped by a short pistil.

**Fruit and seeds.** October to May. Clusters of spherical drupes, 0.2 to 0.3 inch (7 to 8 mm). Pale green in late summer ripening to dark blue to purplish in late winter to spring.

**Ecology.** Thrives in moist open forests, but adaptable to a range of moisture and soil conditions, including rocky cliffs. Shade tolerance allowing early growth under dense stands, but becoming adapted to higher light levels with maturity. Avoids wet areas. Amasses on infested trees, decreasing vigor, and increasing chance of windthrow. Serves as a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch that infects oaks (*Quercus* spp.), elms (*Ulmus* spp.), and maples (*Acer* spp.). Spreads by bird-dispersed seeds and colonizes by trailing and climbing vines that root at nodes. Drupes mildly toxic, discouraging over consumption by birds.

**Resembles** grape, *Vitis* spp., which has a leaf that is similarly shaped but not thick and often hairy.

**History and use.** Introduced from Europe in colonial times. Traditional ornamental and still widely planted as an ornamental. Source of varnish resin, dye, and tanning substances.

States with suspected infestations are shown in gray.

**English Ivy****3071**