

Guide to Invasive English Ivy Removal



What is english ivy?

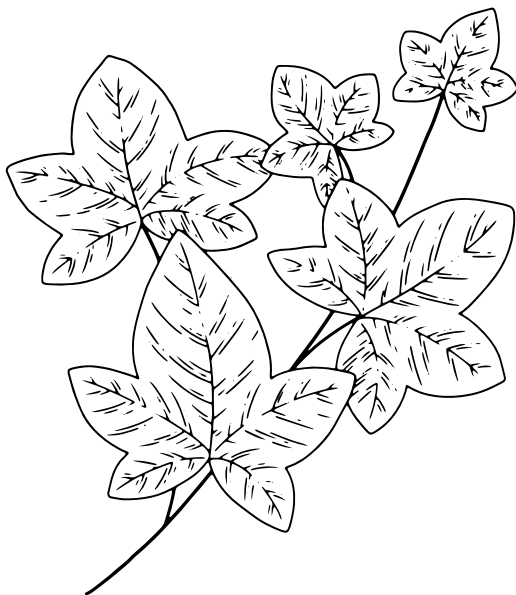
English ivy (*hedera helix*) is a flowering vine native to Europe and west Asia. It's often grown as a durable quick growing houseplant or as a quick ground cover. There are no varieties of ivy native to North America.

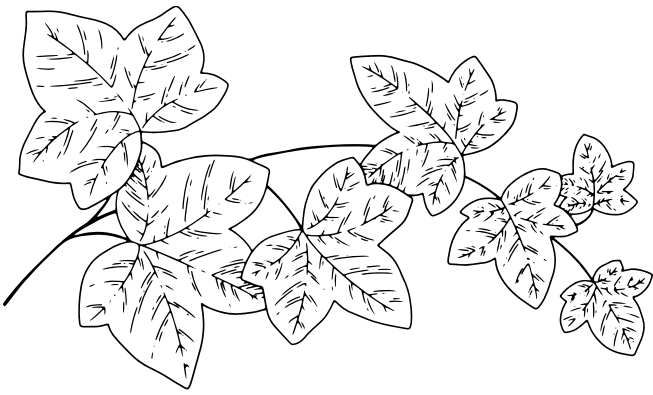
Why remove it?

English ivy is invasive in the pacific northwest (and elsewhere, check your area).

It can easily blanket the forest floor and outcompete native plants. In my experience, the only other ground level plant that survives its take over is the ever robust sword fern.

It also climbs up trees blocking out sunlight to the tree and adding additional weight. If left to grow, the ivy will often end up slowly killing the tree.





How does it spread?

Ivy spreads by two methods.

The first is by stems and roots. Almost any section of ivy vine is capable of producing roots of its own and growing further. Even a tiny vine segment can root itself and start growing a large patch of ivy.

The second is by seeds. Ivy won't flower or produce seeds until it's grown vertically. Often this means after it's grown up a tree or wall. English ivy will then flower and produce black berries that can be spread by birds.

Tools needed

When I go out on ivy removal adventures I bring these things with me:

- A large ikea bag (something to carry the ivy out in that won't drop anything and accidentally spread it)
- Pruning shears
- Gardening gloves (ivy can irritate some people's hands, especially if working with it for long periods of time)
- A small saw to work on trees (some vines can be too large for shears)

You'll want to wear clothes you're comfortable getting dirty and good boots.

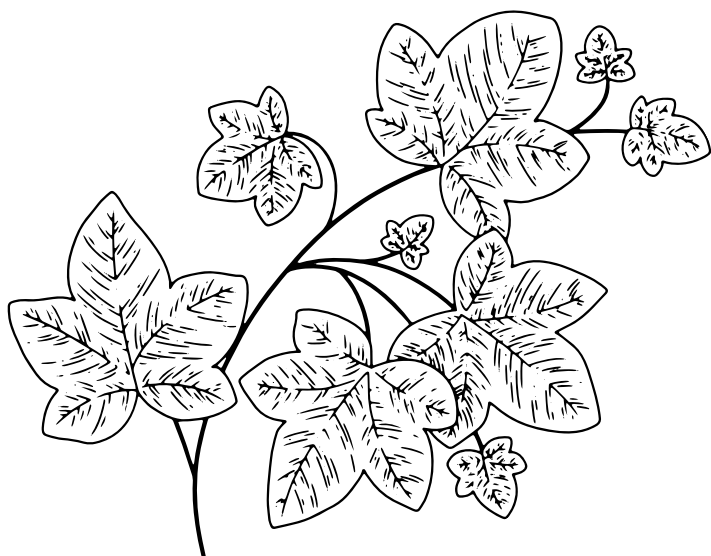
Where to remove english ivy

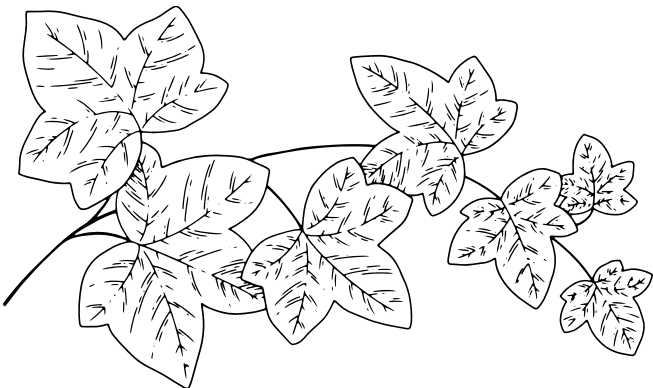
You can work almost anywhere. Most of my work removing ivy has been in a wooded park near my house.

You'll want to pick an area near where you live or that you pass by regularly. Someplace you can easily check on.

If you are working on public land or land that someone else owns, do be careful and cautious of the reactions of others. If you're working somewhere more visible, a high vis vest can go a long way in making people think you're doing officially sanctioned work.

Most of the reactions I've gotten from people have been largely positive and curious. This is definitely impacted by me being a white woman and someone who's lived in the area my whole life.





Removing from trees

When removing english ivy from trees the goal isn't actually to get all of the vines off. Instead, you're trying to stop the supply of nutrients and water to the ivy.

You don't want to pull the ivy off of the bark too much. Ivy grows up the tree by having root like structures find tiny crevices to hold on to and secrete an adhesive. Pulling the ivy off of the tree can easily damage the bark.

Instead chop all of the vines around the tree trunk at about chest height. If there are any large vines you can't cut with shears, it's time to pull out the handsaw and saw through it. Ivy vines can get incredibly thick. The largest I've come across was wider than my arm.

Carefully pull this lower section of vine off of the tree.

Ideally, you should clear a circle around the tree of a foot or two (called the ring of safety). This will help slow the ivy growing back up the tree and help you identify any pesky vines growing towards the tree to chop.

Once you chopped all of the ivy off of the bottom of the tree, you've cut off its supply of water and nutrients. The ivy will slowly begin to die (this can take a while to be visible as ivy is very durable).

Over time the leaves will brown and fall off. The adhesive nature of the vines means they either never come off or can take decades to rot away.

Removing from ground

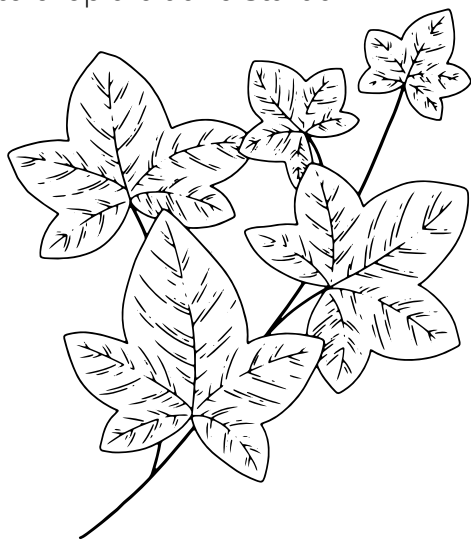
This is my favorite to remove. It's just fun to pull on the long vines.

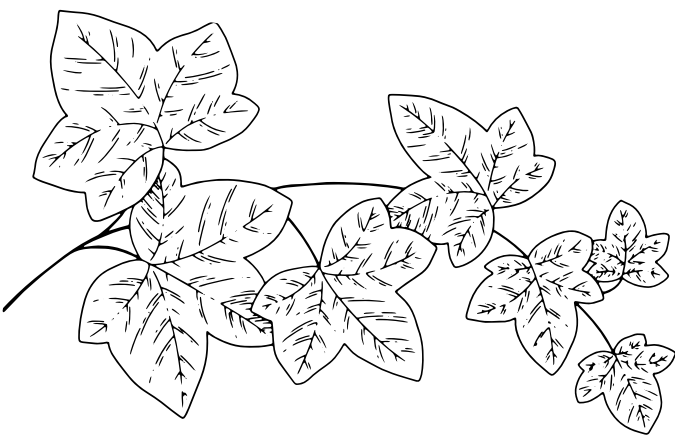
This is for places where the ivy hasn't yet blanketed the ground and isn't just a large mat.

Pull on a vine of ivy. Try to find any branches coming off of it and loosen those before pulling on the vine. Otherwise they will snap off and can easily be left behind. Try to pull as long of a strand as possible. As you pull it up, bundle it in your hand. Once you can't comfortably hold any more, grab a section of vine and wrap it around the bundle to keep it together. This will make it much easier to move and pack later without leaving pieces behind.

I don't worry about ripping off leaves since they won't root on their own. But, small branching vines or clusters of leaves can root. Be careful not to leave them behind.

Once you've pulled up and bunched up all the vines, pack them away in your bag. Try to make sure there's nothing hanging out as you don't want to drop a bit and start a whole new patch.





Removing when its completely carpeted the ground

This is the type of ivy removal I have the least experience with so my advice here will mainly be a collation of others suggestions.

The most common approach to removing carpets of ivy is to create ivy rolls. Along the ground cut a rectangular chunk out of the vines. This can be done with shears cutting along the ground or with a shovel to break the roots. Others have suggested mowing parts of the ivy first to be more easily able to access the vines.

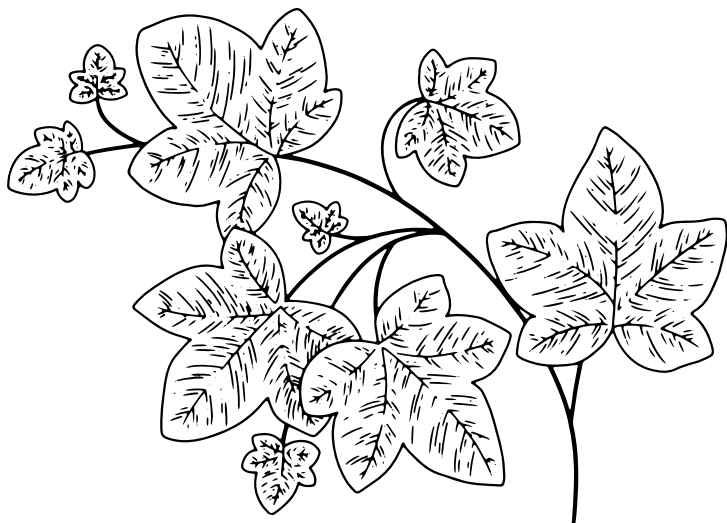
Once you've cut the outline of a rectangle, start rolling the ivy up. This reminds me of the rolls of grass turf you can buy at garden and hardware stores. Be careful to remove as much of the roots as possible.

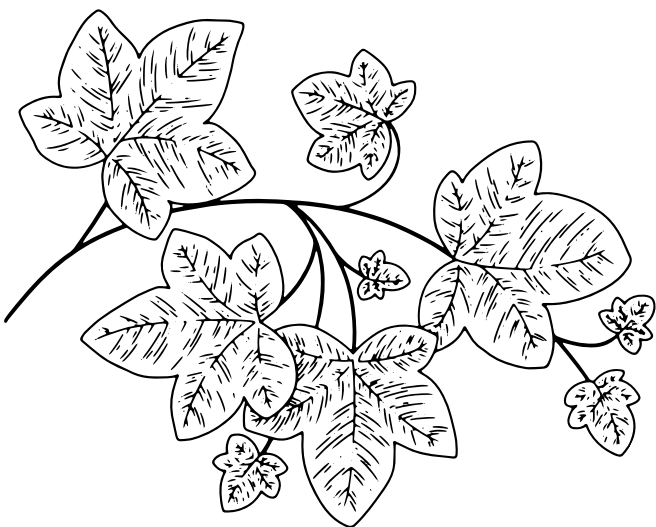
How to dispose of the removed ivy

You might be able to put the ivy in your city's organic waste bin. Check with your city first as they might not accept invasive plants.

Another approach is to create a space for the ivy to either rot or dry out. You can create a compost pile by stacking logs together or using pallets and then piling the ivy on top. The goal here is to create a platform off of the dirt you can put the ivy on to let it die. You can set up your compost pile near where you're removing the ivy to save the work of hauling it around.

Another option is to lay it out on pavement or a plastic sheet. This works best in the summer months where the ivy can dry out. Once the ivy is dry, you can either put it in the organic waste bin or compost it.





Caring for the space afterwards

You'll want to check up on the space in the weeks, months and years following. You'll inevitably leave behind some bit of ivy that will root and grow. Come back and check on the space to see if any new growth is happening and pull it out.

Planting native plants in the space can give them a start in taking back over the ivy's old space. Common choices in the pacific northwest are kinnick, bleeding hearts and wood sorrel. Research the native plants in your area to determine the best fit for the space.

Making laundry detergent

Ivy leaves contain saponins. This chemical works to deter animals from eating the leaves but has some other interesting properties.

Saponins are a type of molecule called a surfactant where one end of the molecule is hydrophobic (water repelling) and the other end is hydrophilic (water loving). This configuration allows for oils and other substances to be dissolved and emulsified in water.

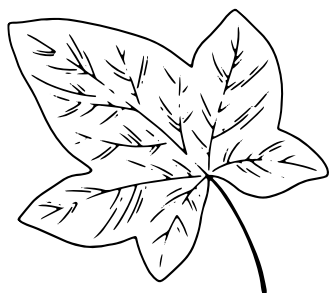
Surfactants are a key ingredient in laundry detergents.

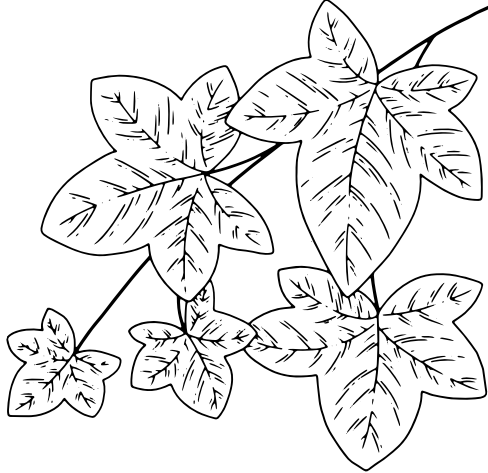
To make laundry detergent out of ivy leaves:

- Collect enough ivy leaves to fill a saucepan.
- Rinse them off to remove any dirt on the leaves.
- Roughly chop them up with scissors or a knife.
- Add to a pot and cover with water.
- Bring to a low simmer for 15 minutes.
- Strain out the leaves and save the liquid
- Add the ivy water to your laundry the same way you'd add liquid detergent.

As you pour the ivy water you will notice it foaming. This means you did it right and the saponins are ready to do their job!

You can also add washing soda to your laundry detergent to give it a boost especially if you live in an area with hard water (water with a high mineral content).





Weaving with ivy

Ivy vines can be used as a weaving material for baskets and such. The length and flexibility of younger vines allows for it to be woven similarly to willow branches.

Medicinal uses

Ivy also has various medicinal properties. The most commonly known and well tested is ivy leaf extract as relief from bronchitis symptoms.

The ivy leaf extract works as an expectorant to help cough up phlegm and reduce congestion.

Consult an experienced herbalist before producing or consuming ivy extract.

Ivy extract should not be consumed by children under 2 and can cause stomach upset and nausea.