

Now is the Time to Free the Trees!!

by Margie Hunter, for the HWEN newsletter

Hillsboro-West End Neighborhood received a wonderful holiday gift in December — frigid temperatures killed the foliage of the English Ivy and Wintercreeper vines climbing our trees — presenting a unique opportunity to cast off their arboreal tyranny without suffering the sad sight of slowly wilting leaves.

Why should we remove these vines from our trees?

English Ivy (Europe) and Wintercreeper (Asia) evolved with other plants and animals on other continents. In North America, they lack their co-evolved pests, diseases, and competition that keep them in check in their native range, giving them a distinct advantage over our North American plants and allowing the vines to proliferate and displace native species. Because these vines are evergreen (keeping their foliage all year), they engulf an area to the exclusion of everything else. Both are considered invasive species in Tennessee.

Like most vines, English Ivy and Wintercreeper seek vertical surfaces to climb toward the light — trees, walls, houses, fences. Once they begin growing upward, the vines mature and begin to flower and fruit. These fruits attract birds who spread the seeds, sowing more of the vines throughout the neighborhood and into Nashville-area parks and other natural green spaces in Tennessee where the vines' invasive characteristics are particularly harmful to native plants and animals.

Due to their prolific growth, both vines can completely coat the trunk of a tree, eventually growing into the branches and producing long leafy stems dangling from the canopy. This adds tremendous weight to the tree, making it more susceptible to breakage or toppling in strong winds or ice storms.

To protect the health and safety of our trees, it's important to keep these vines from growing up the trunks. Now that Mother Nature has removed the foliage this winter, we can cut the vines near the base to prevent their leafing out and avoid the ugly aesthetics of dying vines!

Four simple steps to free trees from evergreen non-native vines

Step 1 — Locate all woody stems growing up the tree. Select a spot on each stem about 18 to 24 inches from the ground. With lopping shears or a saw, cut and remove a 3- to 5-inch section of each stem on the tree. (See photo). To remove the section, it may help to slice through some of the aerial roots attached to the tree's bark with a knife and use a hammer to knock it loose. Protect the tree's bark from damage as much as possible. Everything above this cut is now dead. Leave the lower stump growing in the ground. This step can be done right now!

Step 2 — The stump will sprout new stems and green leaves in a few weeks. In early May, cut another 2- or 3-inch section from the top of the stump. Immediately apply full strength brush and stump killer herbicide to the fresh cut per directions below.** When actively growing, the vine sends manufactured sugars (from photosynthesis) to its roots, and herbicide applied to the freshly cut stem will be pulled into the plant's vascular system. NOTE: Avoid getting herbicide on the tree's trunk by placing a barrier, such as a plastic grocery bag, behind the stem stumps.

Step 3 — Depending on the size and vigor of the vine, one application may not be sufficient to kill the plant. Monitor the stem stumps for new growth through the growing season. Upon signs of growth, repeat Step 2 until the vine no longer produces new stems and leaves. Once dead, you can cut the stem stump to the ground.

Step 4 — Monitor your trees (and other structures) once or twice a year to remove any new vines that may show up in your yard. Catch them early, and it's easy to keep your trees free of invasive vines!

Finally, remove any English Ivy and Wintercreeper vines growing on other structures, such as fences or house walls to prevent flowering and fruiting.

We can all do our part to stop future spread of these noxious vines. Who knows when Mother Nature will give us such a grand opportunity again!

Directions for Safely Treating Invasive Vines **

- Ortho GroundClear Poison Ivy & Tough Brush Killer (Hillsboro Hardware), Fertilome Brush Killer Stump Killer (Ace Hardware), or BioAdvanced Brush Killer Plus (The Home Depot) are recommended. For woody species like ivy and wintercreeper vines, these products need to be used undiluted straight from the bottle (no mixing required). The products are often sold in 32 oz. sizes but might be available in the smaller 16 oz. size. Consider sharing with neighbors!
- Cut a 1-inch strip from a sponge or use a small foam brush to dip into the herbicide absorbing just enough liquid to adequately wet the sponge without dripping and dab it thoroughly on the freshly cut end of the stump. Be sure to recut and treat each and every stem stump. Apply herbicide on a dry day with little chance of rain in early May.
- When done carefully, applying the herbicide directly to the cut end of the stem will only kill the vine, effectively eliminating the possibility of harm to other plants. This highly targeted method also uses the least amount of chemical necessary to do the job. During application, be sure to protect the tree's trunk from the herbicide.
- The active ingredient in these products is triclopyr. Studies show it impacts the target plant's growing tips and breaks down quickly.

- When working with any chemical, follow all product label directions and protect skin and eyes with rubber gloves, long sleeves, and safety goggles.
- Store and dispose of chemical products responsibly.
- Tennessee Invasive Plant Council - www.tnipc.org - lists invasive species in the state, how to control them, and native plant alternatives for landscapes.

If you wish to avoid herbicide, please follow Step 1 and monitor **continually** to remove all new growth as soon as it appears. Over time this should exhaust the roots.



After Step 1.
Arrow shows where to apply herbicide



English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*)