

# Invasive Species to Watch: English Ivy

Despite romantic notions of ivy-covered castles or the perception of ivy as lovely greenery that grows anywhere year-round, there is an **ugly truth about English ivy**. **English ivy** (*Hedera helix*) **is a non-native invasive** evergreen climbing vine that covers everything indiscriminately and is a tree-killer. As a ground cover, English ivy chokes out other plants, creating an “ivy desert” where nothing else can grow. It causes considerable damage to surfaces like wood siding, fences, and foundations and can even damage solid, well-built masonry with its invasive roots. There’s a reason those ivy-covered castles are in ruins!

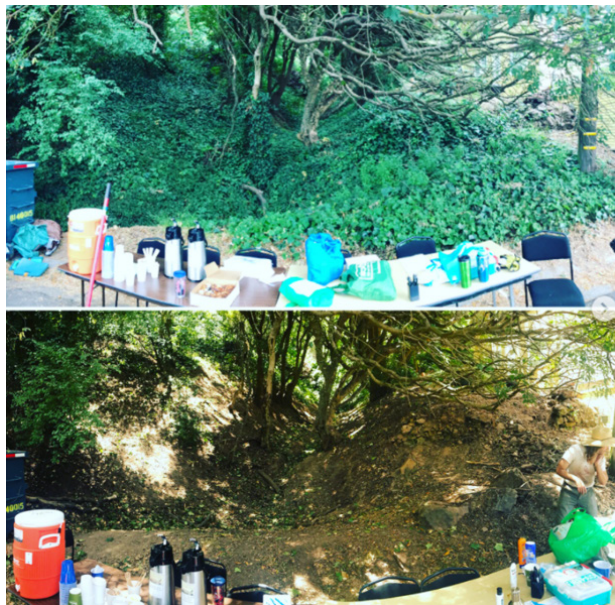


Many think that English ivy is good for preventing erosion. **The exact opposite is true**. Ivy completely depletes the soil of any nutrients, harbors rodents, provides a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and actually exacerbates erosion problems over time. **English ivy is an irritant** and can be known to poison humans and dogs. This vine, grown both as an indoor and outdoor ornamental, has caused poisoning in cattle, dogs, sheep, and even humans. Symptoms of ingestion are difficulty breathing, convulsions, vomiting, paralysis, and coma.

This horribly invasive plant poses **a huge ecological threat** to our community. It is killing local heritage trees. The rootlets burrow under the bark, causing fungus and decay while creating opportunities for disease to enter. Ivy also kills trees by growing up the trunks, overtaking the canopy, and preventing a tree from acquiring the sun that it requires.

**English ivy is especially dangerous** once it escapes the garden because it can spread very quickly through adjacent native woodlands, both by its creeping runners and seed dispersal by birds that eat the berries. Even wildlife is adversely affected by the altered ecosystems caused by an ivy infestation!

**Let’s start by removing ivy from our precious trees** and get rid of this harmful invasive! The Open Space and Ecology Committee, together with the Parks and Recreation Commission, San Bruno Mountain Watch, and city Public Works and Recreation staff have hosted about three habitat restoration days per year, except recently due to County Health Orders restricting gatherings. Some recent habitat restoration days have focused on removing ivy in canyons in central Brisbane and cutting it away from trees, such as the restoration event from July 2018 where two dozen volunteers cleared the Upper Sierra Point Canyon in 3 hours’ time.



## 3 Steps to Remove Ivy from Trees:

1. Use garden clippers to cut ivy at the bottom around the entire trunk of all infested trees. The goal is to separate all ivy vines from their source of nutrients in the soil so they will die. On vines thicker than 1”, carefully saw through the vine and gently ease it away from the bark.
2. Pull all ivy vines out of the ground around the base of the tree, making a 2’ “lifesaver ring” around the tree. This will help protect the tree from re-infestation. Keep this ring clear of ivy.
3. Once cut, you can leave the ivy on the tree; pulling it off could harm the tree. Ivy will gradually blend into the tree bark as it dies.