Why and How to Remove English Ivy from your Trees

Non-native English ivy weakens and kills trees by preventing sunlight from reaching the tree’s leaves, weighing down branches in wind or ice storms, and encasing the trunk so that the tree bark stays moist and, over time, begins to rot. Your tree will be healthier and better able to resist strong wind storms if you keep English ivy from growing into its branches.

The technique used by the Haddonfield Branch Managers to remove ivy is to cut an ivy-free swath of approximately 4 to 6 inches around the circumference of the tree. This strip can be at a height comfortable for you. The ivy above the cuts will die, with the die-off accelerating with hot weather. The leaves will brown and fall off first, with the vines falling off gradually over a few years. Do not pull the vines off, as forced removal will damage the bark. If you can, it will reduce your future maintenance load by pulling out the ivy growing around the base of the tree. Do not use herbicides for this work as they will be absorbed by the tree and can cause significant damage to the tree and any surrounding shrubbery.

We highly recommend wearing long pants, a long sleeved shirt and gloves for this work. While many of the trees are plagued with just English ivy, you may encounter other vines including poison ivy. See the photo below to help you identify poison ivy, as compared with Virginia creeper, which looks similar but is a harmless, native vine. While poison ivy should be avoided, if you encounter it unexpectedly, there are products in the drugstores such as “Tecnu” that may help wash some of the vine’s irritating resin, urushiol, from your skin and clothing. Seek a doctor’s attention quickly if you are highly allergic, however, as there are prescription remedies available.

---

**English Ivy**

- Shiny, evergreen leaves, and branches with air roots to hold the vine as it grows.

**Virginia creeper (on left) vs. Poison ivy (on right)**

- Virginia creeper with five leaflets growing together, even sawtooth-like edges on the leaves. Poison ivy with three leaflets growing together, uneven and inconsistent edges on the leaves. “Leaves of three, let it be!”