**Hedera helix**

Edward F. Gilman

**Introduction**

The small, neat foliage of English Ivy provides excellent material for use as a ground cover or can be allowed to climb, its aerial roots firmly attaching to any rough-textured surface (Fig. 1). The dark green leaves are produced in abundance along the rapidly growing but rarely branching stems. It makes a wonderful ground cover giving a gentle uniformity to any landscape. As the plant climbs a wall or other structure and becomes older, mature leaves develop with fewer lobes.

**General Information**

Scientific name: *Hedera helix*

Pronunciation: HED-dur-uh HEL-licks

Common name(s): English Ivy

Family: Araliaceae

Plant type: ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; hanging basket; suitable for growing indoors; cut foliage/twigs

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**Description**

Height: depends upon supporting structure

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Plant habit: prostrate (flat)

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate

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**Hedera helix -- English Ivy**

**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** lobed
- **Leaf shape:** cordate
- **Leaf venation:** palmate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- **Leaf color:** variegated
- **Fall color:** no fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** white
- **Flower characteristic:** fall flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** round
- **Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- **Fruit cover:** fleshy
- **Fruit color:** unknown
- **Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable
- **Current year stem/twig color:** reddish
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; acidic; loam
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate
- **Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- **Plant spacing:** 18 to 24 inches

**Other**

- **Roots:** not applicable
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- **Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding
- **Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive
- **Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

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**Use and Management**

Ivy tolerates only little foot traffic or other disturbances. Be careful not to step into the bed after it is established. Raking leaves from or cleaning debris out of a bed of ivy can cause severe damage to it. Let leaves drop into the bed and remain in place. Some leaves can be blown out of the bed with a leaf blower.

Growing in full sun to deep shade, English Ivy is tolerant of a wide variety of soils except those kept wet. Plants growing in full sun occasionally burn during the winter in the northern part of its hardiness range. Although somewhat drought-tolerant once established, English Ivy maintains its freshest appearance when given ample moisture. Ivy benefits from some shade, especially when grown in the South. Plant on 1-foot centers for quick establishment.

There are hundreds of cultivars available with different leaf shapes, sizes, and colors including variegated. A few include: 'Baltica', small leaves, very hardy form; 'Buttercup', dark green leaves with light veins, new leaves yellow; 'Fluffy Ruffles', roundish, dark green leaves with undulating margins; 'Gnome', ground-hugging, 1-inch-long, dark green leaves; 'Gold Heart', small dark green leaves with cream centers; 'Hahn’s', small green leaves, bushy growth; 'Harrison', broad dark green leaves, turn reddish-purple in winter; 'Marginata', grey-green leaves with white margins; 'Thorndale' - hardy cultivar suitable for northern climates; and 'Wilson', very hardy form, small leaves, overall height 6 to 8 inches. Some cultivars were developed for tolerance to sunny conditions.

Propagation is by cuttings of young shoots only. Simply trim 3 to 4-inch-long young shoots and stick them several inches into the soil and water regularly to establish a new area with Ivy.

Problems include scale, sooty mold, mealy-bugs, and aphids.

**Pests and Diseases**

Fungus leaf spot and bacterial leaf spot are a problem under moist conditions and in humid climates.