

Crawling, Creeping, Vines (published 2025-10-25)
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Crawling, creeping vines silently slither their way into our gardens, landscapes, and forests. You may not see them at first. Where do they come from? They show up in the unattended areas of my yard, sneaking under the fence, attempting to choke the rhododendron. Now I see them growing up the sides of homes and buildings. Woodland areas and forests are also suffering. Vines can be a nice addition to our gardens, but we must watch them like hawks, ready to attack their twining tendrils before they take over. This article identifies pesky vines common to our region.

NON-NATIVE PERENNIAL VINES

ENGLISH IVY (*Hedera helix*)

English Ivy is native to Europe, arriving in North America in the early 1700s. It is an aggressive, tough, woody vine with dark evergreen, three-lobed leaves. The vine sprouts roots from the main vine stem, spreading as a ground cover or growing vertically, attaching hairy roots to walls and trees. Vines can grow over ninety feet while spreading and smothering their host support and damaging siding and brick mortar.



JAPANESE HONEYSUCKLE (*Lonicera japonica*)

Japanese Honeysuckle arrived in the U.S. in the mid-1800s. The honeysuckle produces an abundance of small, fragrant, tubular white flowers that contain honey-like nectar. Its leaf is small, oblong, and semi-evergreen. Honeysuckle can grow over thirty feet long, twisting its vine around trees and shrubs, shading the canopies, and strangling its host to death.

KUDZU (*Pueraria Montana var. lobata*)

Kudzu first came from China to the U.S for the Plant Exhibition of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Later in the 1930s, the government encouraged the growth of kudzu to prevent soil erosion. By 1997, Congress put kudzu on the Federal Noxious Weed List. Kudzu is a

large, three-leaved, climbing perennial vine. It can grow a foot in one day, up to sixty feet in a single season. Kudzu, like other vines, grows up and over the tree's canopy, shading and eventually smothering the tree. Goat farmers are renting out their goats to help get rid of kudzu.

WINTER CREEPER (*Euonymus fortunei*)

Winter creeper came to the U.S. from Asia as an ornamental ground cover in the early 1900s. Leaves are evergreen, about one inch or less in length, with notched edges, and arranged oppositely along the stem. It can grow up to seventy feet tall, where it shades and overtakes trees. Even as a ground cover, it restricts the growth of native plants.

NATIVE PERENNIAL VINES

POISON IVY (*Toxicodendron radicans*)

Poison Ivy is a toxic vine. The leaf formation is a group of three shiny leaves. Extra protection is needed if you want to eradicate it. Wear long pants, long sleeves, and disposable gloves. All parts of poison ivy contain the toxic compound urushiol, a skin and mucus membrane irritant. **Never** burn poison ivy, as it can damage the respiratory system.

TRUMPET CREEPER (*Campsis radicans*)

The trumpet vine's signature bloom is an orange tubular trumpet-type flower. The leaves on each side of the leaf stem resemble a feather. The vine can grow up to forty feet. It is an aggressive vine sending out runners, ensuring its prolific nature.

VIRGIN'S BOWER (*Clematis virginiana*)

The growth and leaves of Virgin's-bower resemble honeysuckle, but the bloom of Virgin's-bower unfurls with separate petals. Other common names include Devil's Darning Needles and Old Man's Beard. Its fragrant autumn blooms are so abundant that it is difficult to see the vine itself. Virgin's Bower is a rapid grower reaching up to twenty feet with a spread of six feet.

VIRGINIA CREEPER (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

Virginia creeper is an attractive vine with five hand-shaped leaflets. This vine has sucker tendrils that allow it to climb and stick to anything. It grows rapidly, reaching up to fifty feet, and can cause severe damage to buildings and other structures such as gutters, power poles, and wiring.

WILD GRAPE (*Vitis* spp)

Wild grape vines are native but can get out of control and outcompete overstory trees. Leaves are simple, vary in size, heart-shaped, alternate on the vine, with a toothed edge. Grape vines are shade-intolerant.

WISTERIA (*Wisteria* spp.)

Wisteria's leaf formation is much like that of the trumpet vine. Its leaflets grow opposite each other on the stem, resembling a feather. The stunning fragrance and blooms produced by wisteria are what will take your breath away. Wisteria comes in shades of white to lavender. The drooping flower cluster can be eighteen inches long, and the vine can grow up to twenty-five feet.

Unattended vines harbor fungi, insects, and debris. They weigh heavily on trees and other structures. They crowd out other native species. They can even become a fire hazard. Vines will get you if you don't watch out!

Resources

“Lichens and Vines on Trees,”

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/SP660.pdf>

“English Ivy (*Hedera helix*),”

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W231.pdf>

“Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*),”

<https://taes.tennessee.edu/recs/forestry/plants-Japanesehoneysuckle.htm>

“Kudzu in Alabama - History, Uses and Control,”

https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/ja_everest001.pdf

“Winter Creeper,”

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/winter-creeper/>

“Wild grape,”

<https://extension.psu.edu/wild-grape>

“Poison Ivy Identification and Control,”

<https://www.tnstate.edu/extension/documents/Poison%20ivy%20Fact%20sheet%20ANR-7.pdf>

“*Campsis radicans*,”

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/campsis-radicans/>

“*Clematis virginiana*,”

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/clematis-virginiana/>

“*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*,”

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/parthenocissus-quinquefolia/>

“Wisteria,”

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/wisteria/>

“A Guide for Identification and Management of Invasive Plant Species Common in Riparian Areas of East Tennessee,”

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W1198.pdf>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to

send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.