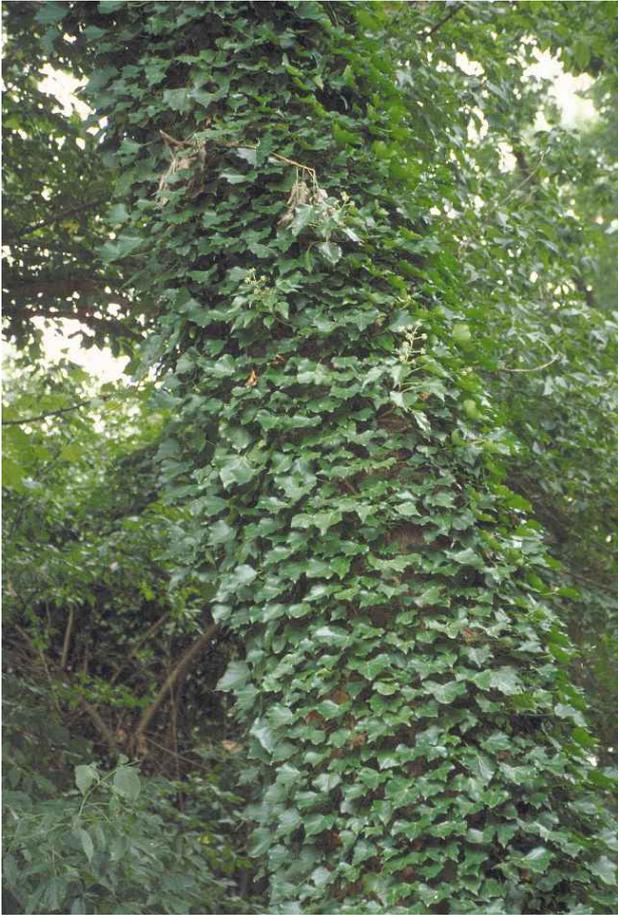


# Saving a tree from English ivy



English ivy grows quickly and can suffocate, starve and weaken trees.



**GARDEN  
DETECTIVE**

Jessica Damiano

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**DEAR JESSICA:** I hear conflicting reports: Is ivy good when it climbs up a tree or is it bad for the tree? And if it's bad, how does one control the spiraling, upward growth?

— Bob Snider,  
Massapequa

**DEAR BOB:** English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is harmful to trees upon which it grows. It clings to surfaces using tendrils, aerial roots and a sticky substance called glycosides. Those roots and tendrils tend to grow under and damage bark, and the weight of the plant, which can easily overtake a tree, can weaken its branches. That weight also places the tree in danger of falling over during wind storms, imperiling people and property on the ground. In addition, a blanket of ivy will block crucial sunlight from the tree, curtailing its ability to photosynthesize. This can deprive the tree of nutrients, essentially starving it. Ivy is also a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other insects,

including those that could further harm the tree, so you'll want to remove the climbing offender as soon as possible.

The process isn't as simple as yanking it off, however, as those pesky roots and tendrils will hold on tightly, and you'll inadvertently remove the tree's protective bark along with the ivy. Instead, using loppers or a pruning saw, cut the ivy all around the tree, about 3 feet off the ground. One by one, carefully dislodge its branches from the lower portion of the plant, which is still growing from the ground. Then dig up and remove it by its roots. Monitor and remove new growth regularly until the plant is depleted. It's best to wear gloves when handling ivy, as the sticky glycosides will irritate your skin.

Leave the severed ivy on the upper portion of the tree, where it will wither and die, and release its strong hold on the tree within a year.

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Stems on this variegated wandering Jew plant indicate a problem.

## Stem problems

**DEAR JESSICA:** Why do some of the stems of my variegated wandering Jew plant become very thin and brittle in the pot? The flowers around it are dry and brittle, but the rest of the stem with the flower is strong. I have two plants from the same cuttings. I originally had a huge healthy plant a few years ago (outside), and have nurtured all the cuttings and plantings the same way. Why does this happen?

— Dee Dee Katz,  
Bellmore

**DEAR DEE DEE:** It's possible your plant has become root-bound. Slip it out of its pot and examine the roots. Are they crowded, growing in a circular pattern around the soil clump or growing out of the pot's drainage holes? If so, the roots should be freed by gently and slightly breaking up the root ball with your hands, then the plant should be potted into a mix containing mostly peat moss in a container that's about 2 inches larger than its current pot. Water the plant thoroughly the day before repotting, and again immediately after. This should be done every two years.

Wandering Jew plants also require supplemental moisture during the winter, so, in addition to providing enough water to keep the soil constantly slightly moist, you should mist the plant frequently. Applying houseplant fertilizer at half-strength once a month will help it thrive, as well.

When they age, however, these plants can simply languish, and when that happens you have two choices: Propagate new plants from cuttings, as you have been doing, and discard the original, or try to rejuvenate the plant by cutting it back. If you choose to do this, clip each stem back to healthy growth, cutting each just above a leaf. This will encourage a fuller, branching habit and, hopefully, a healthier plant.

Good luck.

## What's that bird? Now there's an app for that

**DEAR JESSICA:** I wonder if you can tell me what kind of bird this is. I took the picture from my kitchen window. He was drinking the water from the melting ice.

— Bill Alberigo,  
Garden City Park

**DEAR BILL:** That's a northern mockingbird! I didn't know offhand, but I used the Cornell Lab Merlin Bird ID app to identify your visitor. The app offers help for identifying more than 2,000 species of birds, and will even identify a bird from a photo.

I simply downloaded your photo into the app, entered the town and date the bird was spotted, and in seconds had an identification, plus the following information: "Gray with whitish underparts and long tail. In flight, it becomes



The Cornell Lab Merlin Bird ID app was used to identify this northern mockingbird.

much flashier with large white patches on the black wings and tail. Pale eye. Found in a variety of habitats with bushes and trees, from

neighborhoods to desert scrub and old pastures. Mimics birds, car alarms, slamming doors and other noises in its song, repeating a phrase

5-7 times before switching to the next set of notes."

You can download the app for free from the Apple App Store or Google Play.

