

ivy

Several different kinds of climbing or creeping plants are known by the name of ivy. All are hardy shrubs or vines, growing in moderately cool, moist regions of the Northern Hemisphere. They climb by means of suckerlike disks, which attach themselves to walls and trees, or by means of twining tendrils. Many are cultivated as ornamental plants to cover walls and as ground cover in shady places where grass cannot thrive.

Contrary to common belief, ivy does not ordinarily injure its means of support. A fair growth of ivy on sound walls promotes dryness and warmth, reduces weathering, and adds beauty. However, an excessively heavy growth upon a tree may strangle it.

English ivy (scientific name, *Hedera helix*) belongs to the ginseng family, Araliaceae. It is an evergreen creeping or climbing shrub native to Europe, Asia, and North Africa. It has been introduced into eastern North America, where it grows wild in open woods and is cultivated as an ornamental plant. The leaves of English ivy are single. (Those of some other ivies are compound—that is, divided into several leaflets.) They turn a brilliant scarlet in the fall. The English-ivy berries are black.

A closely related form is Irish ivy (*Hedera canariensis*), native to the Canary Islands and North Africa and introduced into California. The leaves are larger and a richer, deeper green than those of English ivy.

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)—also called woodbine and American ivy—and Japanese, or Boston, ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) belong to the same family as the grapes, Vitaceae. The leaves of the Virginia creeper are divided into five leaflets. The lower leaves of Boston ivy are divided into three leaflets, but the leaves of the climbing stem are single, with three cusps, or points.

Poison ivy (*Rhus toxicodendron*) may be distinguished from Virginia creeper by its three—rather than five—leaflets. The stem of the center leaflet is longer than the stems of the leaflets on either side. This helps to distinguish the plant from Boston ivy. In the fall the berries are creamy, waxy white, whereas those of the other ivies are black or blue.

Ground ivy (*Nepeta hederacea*) is a member of the mint family, Labiatae. It is a creeping plant with blue-purple flowers and leaves about half an inch (about a centimeter) across. This plant does not climb. It grows in shady places from Canada to Oregon and as far south as Georgia. It is also found in Great Britain.

Cite

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"ivy." *Britannica School*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 7 Dec. 2019.
school.eb.com/levels/middle/article/ivy/274732. Accessed 16 Dec. 2019.