

English Ivy by Matthew Shirley

A non-native invasive species, English Ivy, is listed as a noxious weed in Washington and can be found throughout the Refuge, as well as forests across the United States and Europe. It has been a popular introduction in the past, as it is evergreen, grows throughout the winter, and is remarkably robust.

The Ivy creates a dense monoculture groundcover, a habitat suitable only for rodents, at best. The ivy dominates an area by climbing any structure (including itself, given time), and spreading to gather all available light.

The vines are not parasitic, as only the roots attached to the ground absorb nutrients.

The aerial roots only support the plant. The lack of light and the additional weight of the vines makes many plants more susceptible to disease and heavy winds, though most trees survive with a “broccoli head” of foliage breaking through the top. The vines will climb nearly anything, and once they’ve reached a few feet of height, they will enter reproductive mode, producing clusters of black berries that are spread by birds.

Ivy’s ability to bind plants together was symbolic in many tales from medieval folklore, and was used to represent Dionysus, the Greek god of wine (among other things.) Though the vines produce fruit the same color as some grapes, the berries of the English Ivy are poisonous.

If you’re looking to remove the ivy, it can be pulled up by hand, and if the trunk of a large vine is cut, the remainder of the plant will wither making removal less strenuous.