

Not for the love of Ivy, the 'silent killer'

The common English Ivy (*Hedera helix*), or one of its many variations, can lead to the death of even the most majestic tree.

The common ivy is seen in many Burnside gardens and under normal conditions can become quite invasive, unless well maintained and kept in check.

Even the most avid gardener can be daunted by the incredible vigour of a large ivy clump.

The best way to maintain ivy is to be sure about how much of it you want. Don't assume that it will stay where you want it or that other plants will crowd out spreading ivy. English ivy can grow in full sun or dense shade and with very little water.

Regularly spend an hour with a spade and secateurs, confining your ivy to an area where you can gain full access.



English Ivy growing 8 metres into the canopy of an SA Blue Gum.

Ivy spreads by subsurface root runners. Usually these roots can be found within the top 100mm of soil. Running the spade around the outside edge of the clump and lightly digging up around this area will expose any

young shoots. This will help prevent the clump from expanding.

Dense clumps can be mowed to the ground, reducing the overall vigour of the clump and its expansion.

Be very careful that you don't allow the ivy to grow up the trunk of any trees. English Ivy can modify its root system to allow it to cling to the outer cambium layer of the tree trunk. This modified root system provides support for the climbing plant and also draws moisture from the trunk of the tree to the ivy's benefit.

If the level of ivy encircles the trunk and extends up into the main canopy of a tree, this can lead to a reduction in water feeding the upper reaches of the canopy. Over time, the canopy of the tree will thin and the level of deadwood increase, occasionally leading to a tree's death.

Vigilance is all-important where English Ivy is concerned.

Choose carefully and save on tree care costs

Tree care starts at an early stage, with the selection of species and positioning within the garden.

Do you want your tree for shade, screening, flower colour, and so on. Look at the available area and its proximity to existing structures. There is no point planting a tree that grows to a mature height of 20m with a 10m spread when there is not the space for it.

Don't plant a tree close to a boundary fence line or a dwelling without knowing its mature height and spread. Walking the local streets is a good way to find out what size certain species of trees will attain in your area. Be careful not to be fooled by trees that look reasonable when immature, but can become quite massive at maturity.

If the tree is too large for its position, it requires constant pruning to keep it in check.

Always look at the shape and form of your tree before you buy it.

Avoid trees that have more than one main trunk. Look for a well-balanced tree with an even spread of side branches. A well-formed tree has an even taper from the base to the tip.

Avoid planting your tree too deeply as this can smother the root system and lead to collar rot of the trunk. Give all newly planted trees a "watering in", even if the weather is cool with rain imminent.

Regularly inspect your tree, correct any splits or broken branches from the start. A well-balanced tree should have a conical shape when young, with larger stouter branches down low and with a balanced decrease in length and diameter further up the trunk. Keep an eye on the tip of the tree and remove any growth that appears as a second major leader (trunk).

You should only water your tree once a week, but make sure you supply a decent amount.

Owners of large, well-established trees should treat their tree like they do their house - both require regular inspection and/or maintenance. Spending a little every few years can often save thousands in the long term. Even though it might appear extravagant, engaging a reputable arborist or tree surgeon is money well spent. Establishing the shape and form correctly in the first 5-7 years will avoid costly remedial pruning at a later date.

Don't assume by pruning a well-established tree hard that this will overcome immediate issues. Although it may seem to solve the problem, more often than not a tree will respond with what is called epicormal regrowth. This regrowth is more vigorous and ultimately more unsafe than the material originally removed. If you have to prune your tree, don't take more than 10% of the entire canopy off at one time. Any more than this can stress the tree and result in some decline and or poor flowering.