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# Cooks Current

Newsletter

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## The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

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### English Ivy and Periwinkle

My report highlights examples of alien, exotic vines that are still sold as ground covers for ornamental landscape settings. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) are two introduced plants that are used to create maintenance-free planting beds prized for their evergreen foliage and ability to look good year round. Unfortunately, these two plant species are also hard to contain in their original planting beds as they can run amok in forests, crowding out native perennials. Most of us can recall seeing ivy covered trees and walls (another example of how the plants get away from their original locale.)

English ivy is a threat to all levels of forested and open areas. Periwinkle threatens more shaded areas, but stays on the ground. The dense, intertwining growth habit inhibits native perennials, tree and shrub seedlings from forming naturally interacting plant communities, thereby inhibiting insect and animal life all the way up the food chain from amphibians to reptiles, to birds, and mammals. While periwinkle spreads only vegetatively (underground and above ground runners) English ivy can reproduce by vegetative and by seed methods.

When removing these plants, be sure to check for broken stems lodged underground or in soil debris, because these plant parts can start growing again. There are two more biological reasons for avoiding and eliminating English ivy from your landscapes. The first involves a plant pathogen, bacterial leaf scorch (*Xylella fastidiosa*), that can lie dormant on English ivy until it has a chance to infect a wide variety of native plants and trees. The other factor involves chemicals called glycosides that cause some birds to vomit and disseminate seeds.

There are several native plant alternatives to English ivy including Virginia creeper and crossvine. Wild ginger, lady fern, foam flower, partridgeberry, creeping phlox, evergreen wood fern and New York fern are all good substitutes for periwinkle. These and other native plants are available from Edge of the Woods Native Plant Nursery and seasonally from Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve.