



Photo courtesy of Robbie Murphy

Scientific Name: *Hedera helix*

Irish Name: Eihneán

Does Ivy harm trees?

Ivy grows on walls and on other plants for support. It often grows up trees and can become a problem as the weight of ivy can eventually weigh down the branches and weaken the trees.

However, ivy is not a parasite, in that it does not gain nutrients from plants on which it grows.

The roots of ivy may also cause problems on walls, sucking out moisture from loose or poor quality mortar, causing it to crumble.



Ivy is one of the few autumn-flowering plants that is native to Ireland. It trails along the ground, giving groundcover, or climbs up walls and trees with the help of small sucker-like roots. High above the ground it can form a bushy evergreen shrub with spear-shaped rather than typical 'ivy' leaves. Ivy is important for wildlife. Its foliage provides a home for nesting birds and hibernating insects. Its flowers are the last source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects before winter and its dark fruits give food for the birds.

Ivy and Christmas

Ivy is often used to decorate homes at Christmas time. Because ivy leaves are evergreen, staying green all year round, they can brighten up the house over the festive season. They are also said to be a sign of joy and good luck.

There are various different reasons why ivy became a popular decoration in wintertime and at Christmas. Pagans used ivy to decorate their homes in winter as a reminder that the landscape would be green again in spring. As Christianity took hold, this custom was taken up at Christmas time. The plant's ability to climb and cling to another plant or wall as it grew was seen as a symbol of the support received from God and how those in need could cling to Him when in need of help.



Poison Ivy

Poison Ivy is a plant found in North America (it does not grow in Ireland). Its sap can cause an allergic reaction on the skin, leading to severe itching and reddish or colourless bumps and then blistering. Poisonous Ivy is not related to the Common Ivy that grows here in Ireland but it is important to know that all parts of Common Ivy are poisonous.



Poison Ivy
(*Toxicodendron radicans*)