

# The Wrong Kind of Tree Hugger!

By David Mow, Invasive Species Specialist

## Wintercreeper, aka, *Euonymus fortunei*



You have probably seen quite a bit of this invasive plant climbing trees in the Martinsville area. It can kill a tree by girdling it and cutting off the sap flow from the leaves to the roots. It was sold for years to plant on hillsides to prevent erosion but has now escaped into native areas. When mature, it climbs up a tree, flowers, and produces berries that birds eat and spread in their feces around other trees.

The DNR Terrestrial Plant Rule (312 IAC 18-3-25) prohibits the sale, gift, barter, exchange, distribution, or introduction of several highly invasive species to the state of Indiana. Wintercreeper is included in this list of invasive plants and is already widespread in Morgan County. Now the task is to control and eradicate it.

The first step in controlling it is to kill the climbing vines so it does not flower and continue to reproduce and spread. It will not flower or produce berries while growing on the ground. You can kill the climbing vine with a cut-stump method. The stem or vine that is climbing the tree is cut close to the ground, removing a small section of the vine, then apply a small amount of concentrated herbicide to the lower cut surface so it can travel to the roots. You do not need to remove what is up in the tree canopy. Pulling it from the tree can be dangerous.

Controlling what is growing on the ground is more difficult. You can pull it, bag it, and put it in the trash. Any small piece left behind or left on the ground can re-root and grow. It can also be sprayed with herbicide. Late fall and winter are an excellent time to spray because other plants are dormant at this time and will be unaffected by the herbicide. If the temperature is above 50°, you can use an herbicide that has a surfactant added to it will help it stick to the waxy leaves of wintercreeper. You can contact the Morgan County SWCD or the Purdue Extension office to learn what herbicide is best to use in your situation. It will require several years to completely remove it from the area and unfortunately, we have a very large amount growing in Morgan County neighborhoods. When you clean it up on your property, you are doing your part to help and prevent the spread of it!

Some of the native plants recommended by Purdue, as replacement for Wintercreeper are Wild Ginger, *Asarum canadense* and/or species in the Sedge family, *Carex* spp. as ground covers or Virginia Creeper for if you do want a native species that will climb, but not harm the trees.

You can learn more about Wintercreeper and learn to Identify it at [www.MorganCountySWCD.org](http://www.MorganCountySWCD.org) and clicking on the menu button for Invasive Plant Species Information. The SWCD also has technicians and financial resources that can help you get rid of wintercreeper on your property.

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