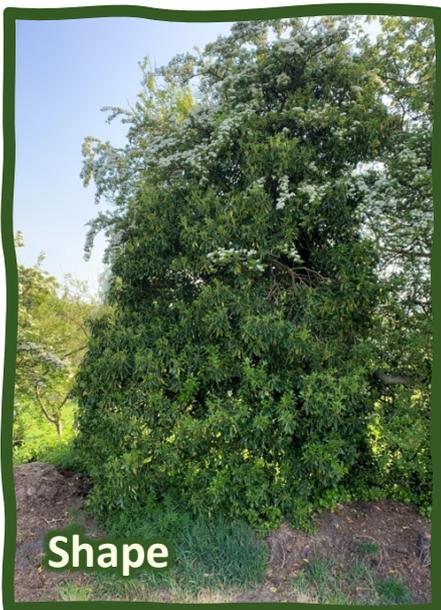


# PLANT ID: Common ivy

*Hedera helix* L.



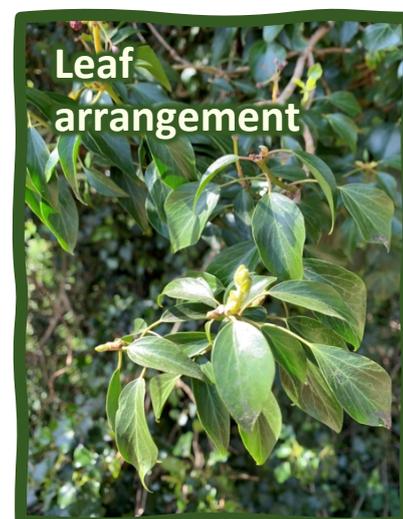
## Spring

For making useful items such as rolling pins when the sap makes it easy to remove the bark.

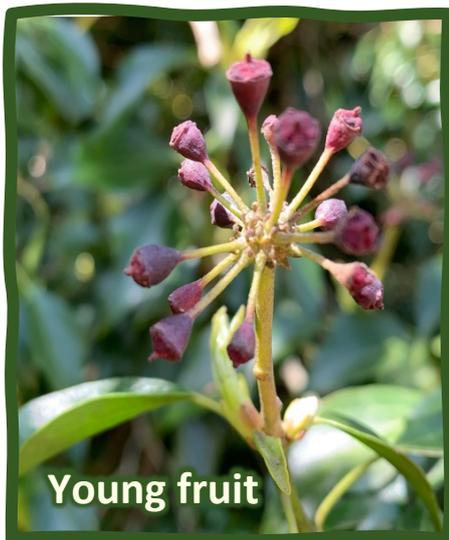
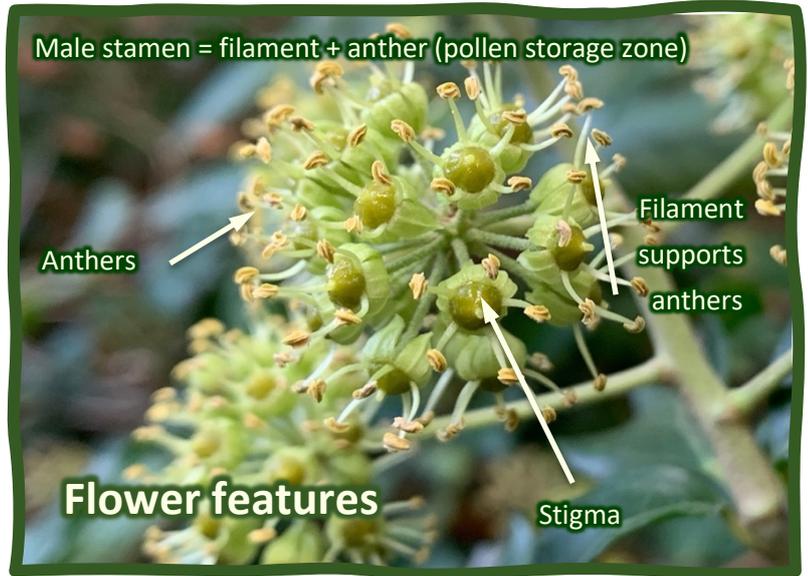
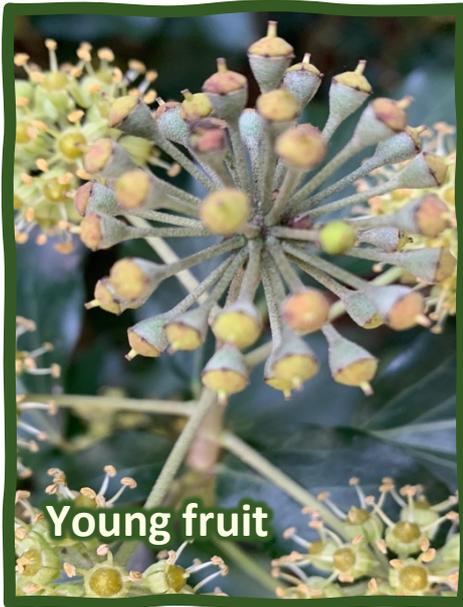
If you're interested in getting up close to the daily lives of Birds and Insects, then a sunny day in spring can't be beaten for observing Birds setting up a nest site or feeding on its ripe black berries.



**Key feature**  
Sucker-like adhesive roots that resemble the legs of a millipede.



PLANT ID: Common Ivy *Hedera helix* L.



**Practical uses:**  
Ivy used to be used for pastry rolling pins because the pastry would not stick to it like other woods.

In the 1940s and earlier, the darkest green leaves were sometimes used at home to clean or restore the colour of clothing. By first steeping leaves in boiling rainwater and leaving for 12hrs, the liquid was ready to sponge down clothing with soiled marks. It worked a treat - apparently!

Poisonous  
If eaten!

# PLANT ID: Common ivy

*Hedera helix* L.

## Fact File:

**CURRENT STATUS:** Common

**LOCATION:** Found almost everywhere across Europe

### ALIASES

Also known as common ivy and English ivy

### Plant Description (aka Taxonomy)

Member of the *Araliaceae* family (*Caprifoliaceae*). A vigorous evergreen woody climbing shrub, that can spread up to 30m in any direction! It forms carpets on woodland floors; smothers trees, derelict buildings and even tomb stones.



**Flowers** from September - November

#### Flower Structure

Individual small flowers group together to form a short stalked yellow - green **umbel** (10-20cm across) shape that resembles a small open umbrella.



**Fruits** from November – March

The **berries** in spring look like milk chocolate lollipops that blacken with age. Poisonous to eat.



#### Leaf

Evergreen. Range of leaf shapes and sizes (4 – 10cm long), from triangular, through to oval, elliptic and 3 to 5 lobed. The shape of leaf relates to the existence of flowers and fruits on the plant.



#### Habitat

Found in many locations, but mainly associated with dry woodlands, hedgerows, old walls, derelict old buildings and scrubby waste ground. They rely on a host like a tree or wall as a prop to climb upwards or along.



#### Magical properties

Used as a wart and verruca charmer. There are accounts of children placing a couple of leaves in their socks over a two-week period and reporting that it worked.



### What to look for

Its mix of dull and glossy rubbery leaves have pale leaf veins and often a marbled surface effect. There are tiny white hairs on the underside of the leaves.

#### Best time to see it and use it

Its evergreen leaves can be collected all year round for decoration, especially at Christmas for wreath making. Rolling pins can be made in springtime when the sap makes it easy to remove the bark.

#### Stem and trunk

Sandy coloured rough bark. The larger trunks of ivy when stripped back to their bare wood look-like ivory. Look out for the thousands of sucker-like adhesive roots that cloak its branches and trunk. These help it cling to its host as it ascends skyward.

### FOOD WEB

Nectar gathered by bees  
Berries eaten by birds and mammals.  
Butterflies lay their eggs and their caterpillars eat the leaves

### IMPERSONATORS: Key similar species are:

Five other woody climbing shrubs such as honeysuckle, clematis, dog-rose and bittersweet can be confused with common ivy. However, these are all deciduous so won't be confused with ivy, especially in the winter. Also, none of them have the sucker-like adhesive roots that ivy has. Honeysuckle has oval leaves that are not glossy; dog-rose has spines along its stem; honeysuckle and clematis leaves are arranged in opposites.



# PLANT ID: Common Ivy *Hedera helix* L.

**What's in a name?** Its Latin name *Hedera helix* describes it as a plant that clings and grasps objects tightly while coiling and spiralling its way around its host.

## Botany glossary (part 1)

**Anthers**- Pollen-bearing part of the Stamen (male) found at its tip.

**Stamen** -Male part of the flower

**Filament** -The stamen of a flower — the part that produces pollen — consists of a slender stalk, called a filament and an anther.

**Stigma** -A stigma is a part of a flower that gets pollen from pollinators such as bees.

**Umbel**- A group of flower stalks radiating out like the spokes of an umbrella.

## Botany glossary (part 2)

**Perennial** – A plant that lives for more than two years and typically flowers and fruits each year thereafter.

**Parasite**- A mutually beneficial relationship (synergy) between species, where one parasitic organism lives on or in another organism, the host.

**Photosynthesis** -The process used by green plants to use sunlight to synthesize nutrients from carbon dioxide and water.

**Umbel** A group of flower stalks radiating out like the spokes of an umbrella.

Get up close to ivy by taking a virtual tour using the Pappus film library.



**Coiling stems**

## Is Common ivy a threat to a living tree?

**No!** Their sucker-like adhesive roots do not penetrate inside the tree and so are not a threat to them.

**Yes!** Total coverage of a tree prevents it from **photosynthesising** sunlight into energy. It also increases the chance of the tree from being blown over in a storm, because large quantities of thick-growing ivy act almost like a ship's sail in high winds.

## Oldest – Largest – Tallest:

Belgium holds the record for the oldest tree at over 170 years old.

Poland has the tallest ivy bush at 25.2 metres.

Italy hosts the largest girth at 2.4 metres.

## Global distribution

Found almost everywhere in the British Isles and across Europe.

## Medicinal uses

In ancient Greece, Hippocrates used ivy to reduce swelling and as an anaesthetic.

Herbalists use it to treat respiratory conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis, inflammation and arthritis.

## Global species risk of extinction

(IUCN – Red Data List)

Ivy's existence is classed as of 'Least Concern'

