



IVIES

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IVIES FOR GROUND COVER

One of the many advantages of ivy is that on the ground it forms a dense enough cover to suppress weeds. For that to happen it must be planted in completely weed-free soil, so thorough preparation of the ground is essential.

A mulch at least 2in (5cm) deep will keep weeds at bay until the ivy has developed sufficiently to do the job. The mulch can be spent mushroom compost, leaf-mould or forest bark chips. It is easiest to spread the mulch on the prepared ground and then plant the ivies through it.

Planting distances for ground cover vary according to the size and vigour of the chosen varieties. The average distance is 30in (75cm); suggestions for the largest varieties can be found on page 51–3. They are only guidelines, as the rate and extent of

growth depends on local conditions. The closer the plants are set, the quicker they will cover the ground, but all plants should be allowed space to develop their full potential; if they are planted too close initially, they will compete with each other for water, nutrients, and light, and may end up as a tangled mass instead of a level sward.

Dense cover can be encouraged by pinching out the tips of shoots to encourage branching, and an even spread can be helped by spreading out the shoots and pegging them down with wire loops or weighting them with stones.

An annual trim with shears, a grass strimmer, or even, for small, neat varieties, a mower with the blades on their highest setting, encourages fresh new growth. Where ivy meets lawn it will be kept within bounds by the mowing of the lawn, and if it encroaches on beds and borders it is easily cut

The texture of an ivy sward contrasts with the grass lawn.



back. Unwanted growth may well have rooted down and can be potted up and grown on to make new plants. Fallen deciduous leaves from overhanging trees can be brushed gently down into the ivy where they will eventually decompose and improve the texture and nutrient level of the soil.

POTTED IVIES

Ivies grown in containers need more attention than those in open ground. Whether they are in pots, window-boxes or hanging baskets, or grown as standards, topiary specimens, climbers or trailers, their containers will dry out rapidly, and the ivies will in time exhaust the available nutrients in the compost.

A large pot of ivy provides height in a collection of container plants.

For ivies planted in containers, use any reliable proprietary brand of soil-less all-purpose or potting compost. The bottom of the container should be covered with a layer of broken crocks (pot shards) or large pebbles to assist drainage – waterlogged roots are the biggest threat to healthy growth.

Once the slow-release nutrients in the compost have been used up it becomes necessary to water the plants with a liquid feed at regular, fortnightly, intervals during spring and summer when they are growing strongly; ivies also appreciate a foliar feed as an occasional treat although too rich a diet should be avoided, particularly for variegated ivies as many of them colour better in poor soil. For advice on how much and how often to feed always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

In time, the plants will outgrow their containers



and need potting on into a larger one. When the roots fill the existing pot, prepare the base of a larger one with a layer of drainage material, then a layer of fresh compost. Lower the plant, with the rootball intact, into the new pot and gently press compost down round the sides till the pot is full.

Pruning ivy in containers is a common-sense affair, carried out to achieve the desired effect and to encourage new growth. Topiary specimens need clipping over closely several times a year.

Trails of ivies in troughs and hanging baskets may need shortening from time to time and will almost certainly need thinning out after a year or two unless they are especially grown for providing a dense curtain. In order to produce graceful plants they should be thinned by removing some of the trails as close to the root as possible so that the remaining shoots can hang separately. On the other hand, if a bushy effect is required, pinch out the growing tips of shoots to induce branching.

Hedera helix
'Glacier' spilling
from an old olive
jar.