

For the love of Ivy!



A still, sunny day in September and early October and a wall of flowering Ivy (*Hedera helix*) is indeed a sight and sound to behold. A rich source of late nectar attracting a humming, last-ditch feeding frenzy for many invertebrates before the long, lean winter months. Here you will find a colourful array of our best loved butterflies, Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock and Painted Lady as well as Honey and Ivy bees, Wasps, Hoverflies and others all taking on life-extending fuel. A massively important but largely underrated and often much maligned species, Ivy offers a lot in the way of food and shelter for our wildlife.

After the flowers come the berries, dark green to black and rather uninviting. They don't ripen until early spring and it is at this time that reserves of other hedgerow berries have been pretty much exhausted. Hawthorn berries, sloes and rose hips will have been foraged by winter thrushes and food sources in the countryside are now dangerously depleted. Ivy berries offer high energy treats at this crucial time with blackbirds, redwings, starlings and many others taking advantage of these timely provisions.



The benefits of Ivy don't stop here. The evergreen foliage makes an excellent early nesting site and shelter from inclement weather for birds such as wrens, robins and blackbirds. Its welcome microclimate attracts many other species from woodlice to wood mice and spiders to hibernating small tortoiseshell butterflies, finding shelter from wind and rain.

However, Ivy does have a propensity to engulf trees and abandoned buildings and this has made it a target for enthusiastic removal.



The Royal Horticultural Society(RHS) website, far from demonising Ivy, offers sensible advice on its huge benefits and control when needed. Ivy is not a parasite like mistletoe and does not penetrate a tree's bark or roots. It simply uses trees and buildings for support to climb and reach light for photosynthesis. Ivy on the trunks of healthy mature trees is not a problem and on buildings will only become a nuisance when growing into existing defects. Potential problems and excessive growth can be

minimized with pruning rather than complete removal. In late spring the spent flowering stalks that have now exhausted their benefits can be pruned away allowing fresh new growth to take over.

Ivy of course, is a staple of churchyards where tall walls, headstones and yew trees provide endless opportunities for its rampant spread. Without some measure of control, our churches would be swamped, headstones unreadable, beautiful stained glass windows covered over and doorways inaccessible. However, the Church of England's own website makes clear its support for churchyards as wildlife havens. It positively encourages good management and the taking of advice from local wildlife groups to maximise the wildlife potential of its churchyards in this time of a growing biodiversity crisis.

Let's face it, if we can't allow God's creatures to flourish in God's acre, where do they have a chance and what sort of Christians are we? Ivy-covered walls, hedgerows, field boundaries and roadside verges are massively important wildlife refuges and corridors. All seem to be targets for the mower, plough and flail. It's time for our propensity for over-tidiness to take a back seat.



Staple Wildlife Friendly Village Supporter-October 2021

Royal Horticultural Society <https://www.rhs.org.uk>

Church of England:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity>