

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Are vines taking over your yards? Here's what you can do about it.

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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I have a saying, “There is no such thing as a small vine.”

Although not 100% accurate, the saying is mostly dead on.

Native and ornamental vines can become weedy problems in your ornamental trees, shrubs and flower beds. Many of these vertical runners can be hard to control if left unchecked.

Remember when you planted Confederate Jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) on your mailbox and had to use a flame thrower to keep it from attacking the mailman?

Along with Confederate jasmine, some of the vines that can take over an entire neighborhood are English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), Wisteria (*Wisteria species*), kudzu (*Pueraria montana*), greenbrier (*Smilax species*) and poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*).

Vines can add aesthetic value to the landscape as well as being an important source of food for wildlife. In a perfect landscape, all vines would be continually maintained or removed when they're small plants. Unfortunately, you might acquire a property that has vines rambling through flower beds and climbing up anything they can grab. Sometimes the previous property owner planted them as ornamentals, and they went unsupervised too long.

When there is a vine to eliminate there are a few tactics that could help in your efforts.

Consider trying to maintain the vine you're about to remove. English ivy and cross vine can be resized with a little pruning. Many of these plants can take years to reach their large size so these plants don't become a problem overnight. Even the mighty kudzu can take years to cover a tree canopy.

Some things to consider are: What will replace the green mass when it's gone? Is the vine that big of a problem? Can it be brought down to a manageable size if pruned?

If a decision is made to remove the plant, there are two ways to do it: physically or with herbicides. The effort of pulling up the vine will vary with the plant. A well-established wisteria can be hard to remove, requiring the use of heavy equipment. I have seen wisteria so large that when I was young, I

had friend who could climb the vine all the way across his large yard from tree to tree through the vine. Last time I checked that wisteria vine was still there. He was a little crazy, so I wouldn't recommend trying to become Tarzan in your yard. On the other side of the spectrum, a young cross vine can be easily removed just by pulling it out by hand.

Campbell Vaughn: American goldfinches spotted dining on blooming sunflowers

If you're not opposed to using herbicides, a combination of manual removal and spray control measures can be the best plan of attack.

Many vines, like wisteria, kudzu and English ivy, can be partially controlled by simply cutting the vines a few inches above the ground and painting the freshly cut stem with an herbicide containing glyphosate (as in 41% Roundup) or triclopyr (as in Brush-B-Gone or BrushTox). Use a full-strength solution mixed with a sticker like 80/20 nonionic surfactant or diesel oil. Cut the stem coming from the ground and immediately apply herbicide with a paint/sponge brush to the wounded vine. The degree of control will depend on the time of year (fall is best) and the plant species. If the vine starts to regrow, wait until the shoots are 6 to 12 inches long. Then treat them with a 5% solution of glyphosate (about 7 ounces to a gallon of water with a 41% active glyphosate product). Either spray it on or wipe it on with a sponge. Glyphosate products leave little to no residue in the soil, so you may wish to consider this if treating vines that are located near other desirable plants in the landscape. The triclopyr product will also work well, but it does leave some residue in the soil which could be harmful to some ornamentals. If the vine is big enough, I have drilled a hole at an angle in the side of the vine and filled the hole with this heavy concentrate to let it soak. A 1/2" to 3/4" diameter hole is ideal. With any post emergent herbicide, take care to prevent spraying desirable plant's foliage and stems.

One other method that seems to be successful is to pull down the vine and bundle as much of the leafy matter into a ball and put it into an area that is away from desirables. Driveways and pine straw beds seem to work well for me. Spray the whole bundle with a 5% solution of glyphosate or a standard rate of triclopyr. Let it stay on the ground for a week or so and reapply if needed. Remember that hydrated plants absorb herbicides best so a day or so after a good rain is best for this method. And when you use any pesticide, always take time to read and follow the label instructions.

One last thing, be careful with poison ivy and poison oak. All parts are poisonous and can cause some serious skin issues. If it has leaves of three, leave it be.

