

Winter Creeper

Euonymus fortunei



Quick Facts: Winter Creeper (*Euonymus fortunei*) is an invasive climbing vine introduced to the United States from China as an ornamental plant in the early 1900s. This species climbs trees, shrubs, and other vertical elements when they are present, and acts as a spreading groundcover when no supports are available. Winter Creeper thrives in full sun to part shade and moist soils, but can survive in full shade and other soil conditions. It forms dense mats of vegetation that shade out native species. The weight of the vines can damage trees and contribute to breakage and falling. The bacterium *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* also uses winter creeper as a host via galls, and can infect and even kill other plants. It is often found on forest floors, fields, and previously cultivated areas.

Invasion Strategy: Winter Creeper spreads by stem propagation. As vines grow, rootlets form when the stem comes into contact with soil. When vines are climbing, aerial rootlets form and attach to bark or even bricks. Both kinds of rootlets can develop into new plants and continue to spread. Seeds of this plant can also be spread by wildlife and water before developing new plants.

Identifying Features: Winter Creeper vines can climb to heights of 30 – 70 feet. When spreading as groundcover, plants can be up to 3 feet tall and will continue to spread indefinitely. It can be identified by the following characteristics:

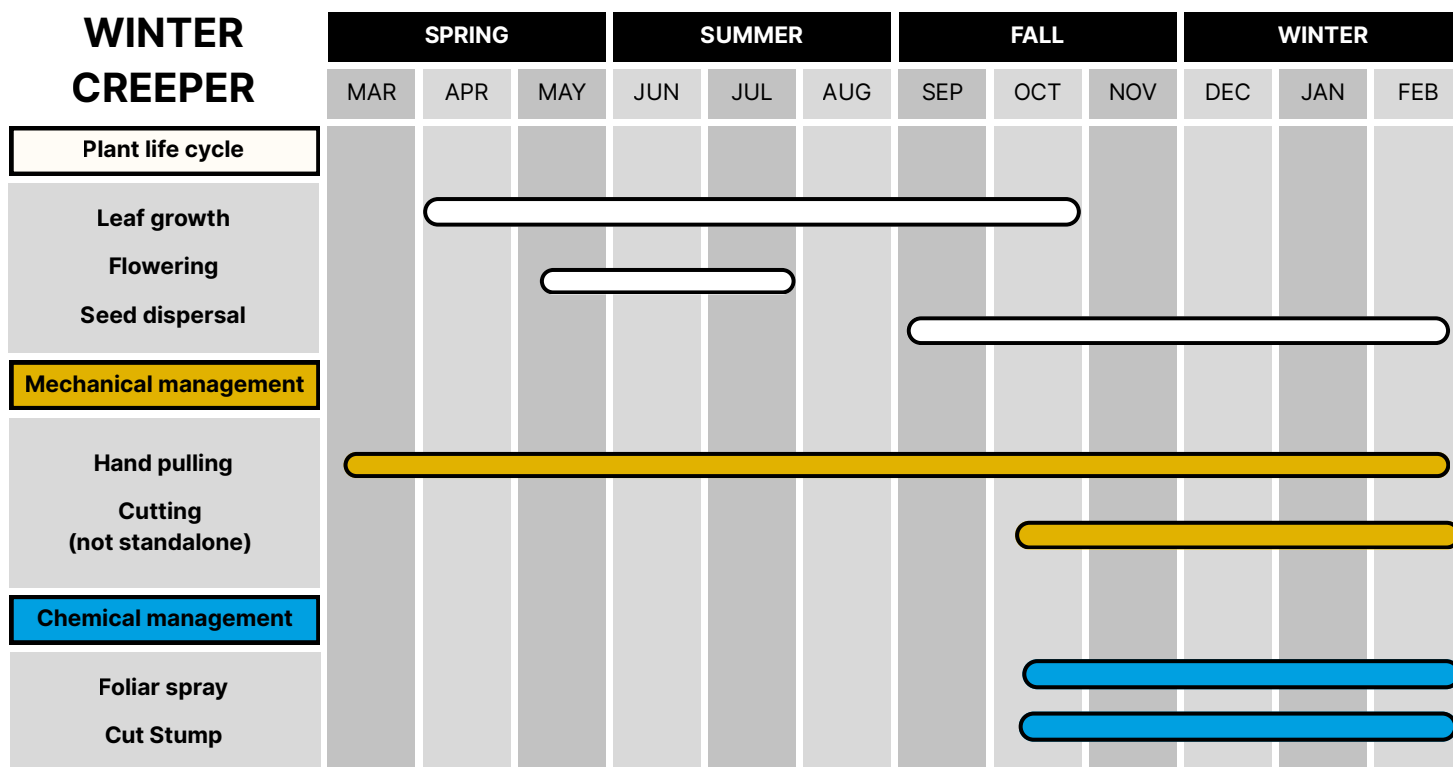
- Leaves are green, with a paler green main vein, and have small, rounded serrations along the edge. Some leaves may be variegated if plants are a cultivar of the species.
- Leaves are oval in shape and often have a waxy or glossy appearance with a leathery texture.
- Leaves are evergreen and arranged opposite along the stem.
- Flowers are small, green / white, and have 4 petals. They appear in clusters with a long flower stalk, and only emerge on climbing plants.
- Fruits are pinkish red, round, and often split to show seeds.
- Seeds are orange / red in color.

[Further
Information
and
References](#)



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This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 6. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management methods:

Mechanical - Hand-pulling is very effective in small, young populations of Winter Creeper. In larger populations, cutting can be used on mature vines as a precursor to herbicide application. Cutting is not recommended as a standalone method because roots can resprout and continue to spread.

Chemical - Foliar spray of Winter Creeper leaves is effective in larger populations with spreading groundcover. For thick vertical vines, cut stump treatment is most impactful. Any herbicide application is most effective in the fall / winter. This species is very persistent, and multiple rounds of treatment may be needed.

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site and context-specific. Check with your local USDA Service Center or University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management information: Dispose of cut plant materials where they cannot resprout. If seeds are present, bag them and dispose in a landfill.

Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, and especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide.



■ Species present

■ Absent

Midwest Invasive Plant Fact Sheet #10 – References and Supplemental Information

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Look-Alike Species:

- Running Strawberry Bush, *Euonymus obovatus*
- Running Strawberry Bush (supplemental photos 1 and 2) is a native woodland groundcover. That looks very similar to Winter Creeper. Winter Creeper leaves are glossier and more finely serrated. Additionally, the flowers of Running Strawberry Bush have 5 petals and be a purple-green color while the flowers of Winter Creeper have 4 petals and are white-green in color.



Look-Alike Species:

- Partridgeberry, *Mitchella ripens*
- Partridgeberry (supplemental photos 3 and 4) is a native, evergreen groundcover that can be mistaken for Winter Creeper. There are some obvious differences: Partridgeberry leaves are much smaller and darker green in color than Winter Creeper leaves. Partridgeberry berries are also deep red and perfectly round.



References and Additional Reading:

- University of Maryland Extension. 2026. [Winter Creeper](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].
- Missouri Department of Conservation. 2011. [Invasive Species – Wintercreeper](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. 2015. [Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania – Winter Creeper](#). [Identification, mechanical, and chemical control information].
- University of Illinois Extension HortAnswers. 2025. [Bacterial Disease - Crown Gall - *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*](#). [Pest information].

Photo Credits: Photo 1: iNaturalist, Luree K; Photo 2: iNaturalist, bobby-b; Photo 3: SRTurner, Dave Woehr; Photo 4: iNaturalist, awatson0622; Range map: USDA PLANTS database; Supplemental photo 1: iNaturalist, tylerben; Supplemental photo 2: iNaturalist, flyinglobster; Supplemental photo 3: iNaturalist, RawrrKayla; Supplemental photo 4: iNaturalist, Matt Demmon.

Resources:

- Find your local [University Extension Program](#)
- Find your local [USDA NRCS Service Center](#)
- Find your local [Soil and Water Conservation District](#)
- Check out other [invasive plant fact sheets](#)

Acknowledgements:

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