

PERIWINKLE

Vinca major

Dogbane or Milkweed Family
(Apocynaceae)



DESCRIPTION

Periwinkle is a spreading perennial vine most commonly found in shaded riparian and disturbed areas.

The leaves are opposite, 2–3 inches long, broadly oval in shape, and pointed at the tip. They are glossy, dark green, and have tiny hairs along the leaf margins and a waxy coating. Flowering stems grow erect to about 1.5 feet, while non-flowering stems become long and trailing. The plants can die back in hot, dry weather.

REPRODUCTION

Periwinkle spreads vegetatively by arching stolons that root at the tips, and by vigorous underground growth of stolons. Like Cape ivy, it also roots from fragments of the stem. The roots are fibrous and form shallow-growing mats typically 6–12 inches below the soil surface. This weed can tolerate a range of soils; wet conditions trigger spurts of vegetative growth. Single, blue-purple, tubular flowers with 5 flattened petals bloom between March and July. It is not clear whether periwinkle can produce viable seed in California.

IMPACT

Periwinkle forms a dense carpet of both above-ground vegetation and matted roots that excludes native groundcover species and prevents seedlings of trees and shrubs from establishing. Periwinkle can also contribute to soil erosion along streambanks.

KEY FACTORS

- u Resprouts from root fragments (typically greater than a quarter-inch in diameter) left in the soil.
- u Rapid growth.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- u **Pull** up the dense vegetation and underlying stolons using a McLeod. Pull the roots up from the base of the stems. If working in clay or dense soils, roots may break off, and follow-up grubbing may be required to ensure removal.
- u **Pull** periwinkle by hand if it is a very small patch in sandy or loamy soil. Generally, this method only works if the roots are within 1–2 inches of the soil surface or if the soil is loose and very moist.
- u **Brushcut** the vines close to the ground and then cover the area with weed fabric, black plastic, or cardboard. Leave for at least 1 year, possibly 2. Some practitioners use a combined treatment by cutting back the aboveground vegetation, grubbing out the roots, and then covering. Weed fabric is expensive and may be practical only for small infestations. You may want to consider using layers of cardboard or carpet instead.
- u **Dig** a trench around the patch, 6 inches deeper than the stolons, and line it with fabric to temporarily contain periwinkle. This will prevent the root system from expanding until the patch can be further controlled.

u **Foliar spray.** Some practitioners report excellent results with spraying and no cutting. Others cut the plant close to the ground in spring when periwinkle is actively growing, using a brushcutter, scythe, or weed whip, and then, within 1 minute of cutting, spray a 2 percent solution of glyphosate onto the cut stems. The purpose of cutting the vines beforehand is to break up the waxy cuticle and improve absorption of the herbicide. Spring is the most effective time for this treatment.

DISPOSAL

As with Cape ivy, it is important to remove any larger broken stems and root sections from the site as these will resprout. The cut vines can be piled on a tarp and left to decompose. Turn the piles periodically, making sure no stems come in contact with soil or water. Alternatively, bag the vines and dispose.

FOLLOW-UP

Monitor the site at least every 3 months for resprouts, depending on how moist the site is. If you use landscape fabric, check that it is still held firmly in place, and pull up or grub out any escaped plants.

INTERESTING FACTS

Native to Mediterranean Europe, periwinkle's use as a medicinal plant goes back hundreds of years. The leaves have traditionally been used as an astringent and to reduce hemorrhages, and magicians added them to love potions! It was probably introduced to the US as an ornamental.

Notes