

IVY ON BRICKWORK

Introduction

Ivy growth on brickwork in some locales is common - especially on older brick masonry. Some would say that ivy and brickwork naturally go together. But while allowing ivy to grow on brickwork does impart some benefits, it can also be detrimental. This *Brick Brief* addresses the advantages and disadvantages of ivy growth and how to remove it if desired.

Ivy, Yes or No?

There is no single easy answer to this question. All of the facts must be considered in any evaluation of the beauty and desirability of ivy growing on brick masonry. Presuming that the wall is known to be well-built with quality materials, it can be expected to last hundreds of years. However, the growth of ivy on a wall, even if it is not removed by force or with chemicals, may shorten the life of a well-constructed wall. If the walls are not properly constructed of quality units, properly prepared mortar with well-tooled joints and good workmanship practices (all joints completely filled) the wall may be more susceptible to damage.

Disadvantages of Ivy:

- The tentacles and tendrils of some climbing ivy can, over a period of time, dislodge mortar and masonry units.
- The tendrils and plant growth may discolor the brickwork.
- Plant growth (ivy) on the face of brick masonry may tend to keep moisture entrapped and in contact with the masonry. This may lead to or contribute to efflorescence or staining of the wall.
- Ivy and other plant growth can also become a harbor for nesting insects, birds or other animal life and offer them easy access to the inside of the building.
- Removal is difficult at best and may damage the masonry.

Advantages of Ivy:

- Ivy reduces wall temperature, possibly reducing summer cooling costs.
- Ivy sheds rainwater, possibly reducing moisture contacting the wall.
- Aesthetically desirable in the opinion of some people individuals.

Proper maintenance of walls with growing vines includes keeping the vines trimmed around and away from windows, gutters, eaves, woodwork, and other decorations.

Removal of Ivy

Before deciding to remove ivy, several questions should be answered:

- What are the reasons for removing the ivy?
- Is the wall properly constructed of quality materials and good craftsmanship?
- What is the value, both aesthetically and ecologically speaking, of ivy on the wall?

If removal is considered, it should be attempted in a small area. Avoid pulling the vines away from the wall since this may damage the brick or mortar. Carefully cut away a few square feet of vine in an inconspicuous area and see how much the ivy has rooted into the brickwork. Also, inspect the exposed area for condition and appearance. Then visualize the prospective appearance of the wall with the vines cut away. Repointing or other repairs may be necessary if the ivy is removed. These issues should help you decide if de-vining is necessary or feasible.

If it is decided to remove the ivy, carefully cut it away close to the wall. There will be some remnants left on the wall. These are "suckers" embedded in the brickwork that previously attached and held the vines. **DO NOT** use chemicals or acids to try to remove them - since this increases the risk of damaging or staining the wall. The suckers should be left in place until they dry up and turn dark. They can then be removed with a stiff fiber brush and some laundry detergent. Do not wait too long because if the suckers rot and oxidize, they may become very hard and nearly impossible to remove without doing damage to the wall surface. Two or three weeks should be sufficient time.



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