



common periwinkle

Vinca minor

Identification:

Common Perennial shrub, deciduous Height: 4-8"

Width: ∞

Leaf Arrangement: alternate

Flower: Lavender

Blooms: Late spring

Fruit: Pod

Fall Color: Green

Apocynaceae (Dogbane family)

Originally from Europe, periwinkle, which is also known as vinca, is an evergreen perennial vine in the dogbane family (Apocynaceae) that grows in shade. It is a creeping groundcover that grows no taller than 8". The leaves are arranged opposite to each other on the stem or in whorls and are roughly ovular in shape with smooth margins and a rounded point at the tip. The leaves are about 1.5" long and less than 1" wide and are noticeably thick, stiff and glossy with a dark green color. The plant contains a milky latex which can be observed when you remove a leaf. In spring it can produce lavender, 5-petaled flowers that are a bit more than 1" across, that are similar in appearance to phlox or petunia.



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AKA: Vinca, Creeping Myrtle, Running Myrtle, Lesser Periwinkle

Description & Impact:

Though initially charming, this plant will spread aggressively, displacing and excluding other plants. Its semi-woody stems spread across the ground surface rooting at intervals along the stem, forming a dense mat of stems and leaves above ground and many rootlets from which plants can resprout. It is difficult to eradicate because its weak stems often snap before the root can be removed, making hand weeding difficult and a thick waxy cuticle layer on the leaves reduces the effectiveness of most herbicides.



Control Methods:

Hand Removal: Follow the stems to where they root, then carefully pull or dig the root out of the ground along with the rest of the plant. This method is very labor intensive for large colonies.

Chemical: The thick waxy cuticle that covers the leaves of periwinkle will repel most water-based herbicides. Adding relatively high volumes of strong surfactants (such as a crop oil like methylated soybean oil at up to 3oz per gallon of herbicide mix) to a water-based mix of triclopyr (Garlon®) should increase penetration. Alternately, use an oil-soluble herbicide such as triclopyr (Garlon® 4, etc.) mixed with mineral oil. We recommend the strongest concentration recommended on the product label. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Because periwinkle stays green year-round it is a good candidate for dormant season herbicide application which can prevent damage to surrounding vegetation. Spray the plants on warm (preferably 40°F or warmer), sunny days in late fall or early spring.

Organic herbicides such as Avenger® Weed Killer and Phydura® may be effective at top-killing this plant by breaking down its cuticle layer, though repeat applications will be necessary.

Prescribed burns will also have a negative impact on this species, but repeated burns over several years will likely be necessary for control.

Revegetation Recommendations: This plant often grows in heavy shade where native plants have a hard time competing. Thinning the overstory to increase light levels to the ground will help in reestablishing desirable vegetation. Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*) and Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) are both great native ground covers for shady areas. Great Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum appendiculatum*) is similar to Virginia waterleaf, though rarer in the wild, less aggressive, and less commonly available for sale. No native plants have dark, glossy foliage like periwinkle. American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) has somewhat similar vegetation but it tends to climb. Look to Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) or Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) for attractive, low growing, pale-purple flowers in shady spots.

Citations: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/periwinkle>