

Lavant Horticultural Society



Bryony (White Bryony, *Bryonia dioica*)

This member of the cucumber family can look quite attractive, with its handsome lobed leaves, small greenish 5 petal flowers and its berries that start almost white and ripen to bright red. Do not be fooled! Left to its own devices, this vigorous climber is a real threat in the garden.

You could imagine it quickly masking an unsightly wall or fence. Unfortunately, it prefers to climb up other plants, hanging on tenaciously with its tendrils, like coiled springs. Herbaceous perennials, shrubs, trees, including fruit trees, hedges – anything that offers it a way upwards. It might start with a single stem, but in no time at all there will be a whole mass of it smothering its chosen support.

It can weaken hedges by reducing light available to the leaves of the hedge plants and it will just pull down less sturdy plants.

Although it appears to die off as winter approaches, it rapidly builds up a tuberous root that guarantees its reappearance the next spring. These tubers can get very big, resembling gigantic (and very toxic) parsnips.

How to control it? A total week-killer that goes down to the roots, like glyphosate based ones, would be effective, but they would also kill the plants the bryony is climbing up. You would need to unravel the bryony and lay it on bare soil.

Otherwise, firstly remove all the top growth to stop it smothering and pulling down plants. Do this carefully – just pulling on the bryony vines can easily damage the plant it is growing on; it can even break branches on small trees, so unravel them with care.

Then you need to dig up the roots – easier said than done, as it is difficult to ensure that no bits of the tuber break off. Also, bryony often grows from the base of hedges, shrubs and trees (probably due to birds perching there while eating the berries). So extricate the bryony tubers from the roots of the other plants as best you can, preferably in the dormant season.



Bryony smothering wisteria



Bryony on a hawthorn hedge

Once you have bryony in the garden, you will be lucky if you can completely eradicate it. However, if you remove as much of it as you can and tackle it when it reappears before it damages other plants, you can reduce it to an interesting little intruder rather than a real threat.