

Vines in the Landscape: Virginia Creeper

02/05/2026

Plant Characteristics

Scientific Name

- *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Common Names

- Virginia creeper
- Woodbine
- Five-finger



Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) is a vigorous and aggressive deciduous vine in the grape family (Vitaceae), known for its rapid growth, dense foliage, and striking fall color. Native to eastern and central North America, its natural range extends from southern Canada to much of the United States.

Virginia creeper can climb 50–60 feet, sometimes growing as much as 20 feet in a single season. After unchecked growth over multiple years, Virginia creeper can weigh hundreds of pounds; therefore, a heavy-duty, well-built trellis is required to support it. The trellis should be able to support substantial weight and wind pressure. For a lightweight trellis system, it is wise to prune the plant to

keep it in the same shape and size each year. Virginia creeper can also attach to most rough surfaces, such as bark, rock, or masonry, using tendrils tipped with small adhesive pads. Some landscapers consider this plant a nuisance because of its aggressive growth, potential damage to weak structures, and difficulty in removing, but others love it for its potential for erosion control, rapid coverage, fall color, and as a bird and pollinator habitat.

Parthenocissus quinquefolia (Virginia creeper)					
PLANT TYPE Vine	HEIGHT Grow to 60 ft	WIDTH 20 ft	SUN REQUIREMENT Sun, part shade, shade		
FLOWER Inconspicuous green color	FLOWERING SEASON Late spring	FRUIT COLOR Black, blue	FRUIT SEASON Small clusters in late summer		
LEAF COLOR Green when matured. Crimson or purple in fall season	WATER REQUIREMENT Low	USDA 3-9	USDA ZONE 3-9		

Foliage



Figure 1. Seasonal

Color Variation in Virginia Creeper Leaves, From Summer Green (left) to Reddish-Green (center) and Fall Red (right) Virginia creeper is a broadleaf, deciduous vine with foliage that transforms from rich green in summer to vibrant crimson and purple in fall. The leaves are alternate and palmately compound, typically composed of five obovate-shaped leaflets, each measuring 3 to 6 inches long. The leaf margins are coarsely toothed, with a glossy green upper surface and a paler underside, adding texture and visual interest throughout the growing season (Figure 1).



Figure 2. Flowers of

Virginia Creeper: Clustered Small, Green Blossoms on Reddish Stems
Flowers

Virginia creeper produces inconspicuous flowers, hidden in the foliage. Flowering time in Utah is usually from June to August. The flowers of Virginia creeper are small, about ¼ inch in diameter, and greenish-white in color. The blooms

are insect-pollinated and may be perfect, staminate, pistillate, or a mixture of all three types on a single plant (Figure 2).

Fruits

Flowers turn into clusters of bluish-black berries that mature in late summer and often persist into early winter. Each berry contains two to three seeds, and while toxic to humans and domestic animals if consumed in large quantities, it serves as an important food source for birds and small wildlife such as squirrels and chipmunks (Figure 3).

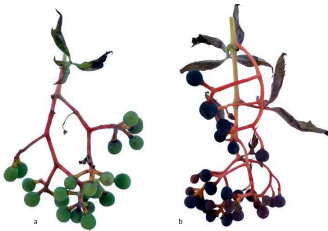


Figure 3. Fruits in Late

Spring (a) and Early Fall (b)

Soil

Virginia creeper thrives in moist, well-drained soils but can also adapt to drier conditions. It is both heat and cold-tolerant and can grow in partial shade or full sun. The older vines are better equipped to handle drought conditions than the younger ones. These vines are commonly found along open clearing borders, fencerows, and streambanks. Additionally, these vines also exhibit a higher tolerance to saline soils.

Planting Guidelines

Virginia creeper is easy to grow and tolerates a wide range of soil and environmental conditions. However, it is essential to understand that this plant is dominant and grows quickly, so it can overtake nearby plants. Virginia creeper is often grown from seeds spread by birds, but they can also be propagated through softwood, semi-hardwood, or hardwood stem cuttings, root cuttings, or layering.

Virginia creeper is usually sold in 1- to 5-gallon containers. To plant vines sold in containers, dig a hole at least twice as wide as the root ball and as deep as the container. Then, gently place the root ball in the hole. Break the root ball if the plant is root-bound, i.e., many visible roots circling the outer edge of the root or the root ball is hard. Fill the hole with the removed soil, water it, and mulch to

retain moisture. Finally, loosely attach the vine to a strong trellis or fence system to guide its growth.

Pests and Diseases

Virginia creeper is considered a resilient plant with very few serious pests or diseases. However, it can occasionally be affected by leaf spots, powdery mildew, or fungal leaf blight, especially during humid or crowded conditions. Insects such as aphids, scale, and leafhoppers may feed on the foliage but rarely cause significant damage. Good air circulation, proper spacing, and avoiding overhead irrigation can help minimize moisture issues. Infrequently, beetles and sphinx moth caterpillars may also attack the plant.

Management and Cautions

Virginia creeper requires regular pruning to control its rapid spread. Its adhesive pads can cling tightly and may damage painted or stucco surfaces. The berries are toxic to humans, and the sap can irritate the skin of many pets. Hence, wear gloves when pruning. Without proper management, the plant can easily overwhelm small gardens or climb into trees, becoming difficult to contain.

Look-Alikes

Use a helpful mnemonic to distinguish between Virginia creeper and poison ivy: "Leaflets three, let it be; leaflets five, let it thrive."

Several vines can be mistaken for Virginia creeper due to their similar growth habits and leaf structures. Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) is one of the most common look-alikes. It has three leaflets and clings to surfaces using hairlike aerial roots, whereas Virginia creeper has five leaflets and climbs using tendrils tipped with adhesive pads. A helpful mnemonic to distinguish them is: "Leaflets three, let it be; leaflets five, let it thrive." Another similar species is the false Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus inserta*), which resembles the Virginia creeper but lacks adhesive pads and climbs by twining around supports instead of adhering directly to surfaces.

Landscape Performance in Utah

Virginia creeper performs well under Utah's diverse climate conditions, tolerating both the intense summer heat and snowy winters, as well as Utah's alkaline soils (Figure 4). Older vines are drought-tolerant, but irrigation is

required during the establishment phase. The vine's showy fall color is most vibrant and consistent when plants are thriving and are grown in full sun. Landscapers can use Virginia creeper as a versatile plant that can grow rapidly to cover fences, walls, trellises, and arbors. It can also be grown as a groundcover on slopes for effective erosion control.



Figure 4. *Virginia Creeper's Three-Stage Seasonal Growth at Utah State University's Greenville Research Farm: Early Emergence in April, Peak Summer Foliage in July, and Vibrant Fall Coloration in October*

Takeaways: USU Greenville Research Farm Virginia Creeper Study

In June of 2023, researchers planted twenty-four 1-gallon Virginia creeper plants at Utah State University's Greenville Research Farm in Logan, Utah. Each vine had its own trellis and drip irrigation outlet and received ample irrigation, i.e., 80% of reference evapotranspiration (Eto) in the first year.

In 2024 and 2025, vines either received low (two irrigations), medium (four to five irrigations), or high (eight to nine irrigations); however, none of the plant was impacted by irrigation treatments. Despite record snowfall in the winter of 2023–24 and an unusually hot and dry summer in 2025, all vines kept growing vigorously (Figure 5). These findings confirm Virginia creeper's strong adaptability to semi-arid, high-elevation climates and its suitability for low-water landscaping in the Intermountain West.



Figure 5. *Virginia Creeper Two-Season Growth Under Three Irrigation Treatments: Low (a), Medium (b), and High (c)*

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