

The Ivy League

The Ivy League by Jason Canon *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* is commonly known as Boston Ivy, Cotta Japanese Ivy. It covers the exterior walls of a number of prestigious northeastern universities and is probably responsible for the term "Ivy League." Boston Ivy is a deciduous, self-clinging vine with large (to 4-8 inches) glossy leaves. The color of the leaves changes with the season starting with light green in spring, dark green in summer, and peach to scarlet crimson in fall. The Boston Ivy vine has tendrils that have 5 to 8 branches, each of which ends with an adhesive-like tip. It secretes calcium carbonate, which serves as an adhesive and gives it the ability to attach itself to a wall without requiring any additional support. It can be easy to confuse this plant with evergreen English Ivy, which clings much tighter to a surface. Boston Ivy will grow along the ground but the vine loves to climb the brick or stone walls of buildings. A north or east wall works the best. It can get spread 30-60 feet and is one of the fastest growing vines. Other than buildings, it will also climb tree trunks, arbors, trellises or retaining walls. In addition to growing it on walls you can use Boston Ivy for screening or camouflage. It is a tough vine that tolerates urban settings, is salt tolerant, and easily handles most conditions including shade and drought. This fast-growing vine is hardy from USDA Zones 4 to 10 but does best in climates with cool summer nights. Boston Ivy flowers are small, green, and difficult to locate. They develop into blue-black berries on red stalks, which become apparent after the leaves fall. Birds typically consume the berries before winter arrives. The foliage of Boston Ivy looks similar to maple leaves, especially when it turns deep red in autumn. It is usually pest-free but Japanese beetles can damage leaves in the sunshine. This ivy makes an excellent backdrop for summer flowers, especially reds, yellows, oranges, and whites.