

Poison Ivy, Poison Sumac and Poison Oak



Poison Ivy: Many are familiar with the old saying “Leaves of three, let them be”. This holds true for poison ivy– the leaf texture and what individual plant leaflets look like varies from plant to plant, but it will always grow in sets of three leaflets. The plant is seen both as a vine and as a short woody perennial. The plant has been seen growing in the understory of many forests, along fence rows, or in deserted areas. Whitish berries will appear on the woody stem in late summer and will remain throughout the winter months.



Poison Sumac: In contrast to the shorter poison ivy plant, poison sumac is a larger shrub or tree, reaching a mature height of about 20 feet. The leaves are arranged in leaflets anywhere from 7 to 13. The midribs are often red or scarlet in color, and the leaves are glossy green on top and pale green on the bottom. Fruits are ivory to pale green and appear in late summer. They hang in loose clusters and are about 8 inches long. Most poison sumac are found growing in wet, swampy areas. Poison sumac is quite possibly the most poisonous plant in this area, leaving many people with skin irritation, rashes and blisters for days after coming in contact with it.



Poison Oak: Poison ivy and poison oak look rather similar. Typically, they will grow as a small shrub-like plant and they have leaflets of three. The leaves are glossy on top but typically have more lobes on the leaflets than poison ivy does. White-green berries form in clusters in mid- to late summer. They are most likely to be found along fence rows, or in wild or forested areas.

General Information: All three plants have urushiol oil inside the plant, which is what causes the skin irritation in humans. One important thing to note is that susceptibility to the oils in the plant can develop at any time. Even though you may have not gotten a rash at one time from touching the plant, it doesn't mean you are immune. The oils also remain active in the plant in the winter months and up to 5 years in dead plants. All parts of these plants except the pollen are poisonous, so pulling dormant twigs in the winter months will still result in an uncomfortable rash. Use extreme caution when dealing with these weeds at all times of the year!

Created by: Jessica Wickland

Seasonal Horticulture Assistant
Outagamie County UW-Extension
3365 W Brewster St.

Telephone: (920) 832-5119

Website: <http://outagamie.uwex.edu/>

Publications: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu>

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Control: If one wants to eradicate this weed, patience is needed. Some have found that spraying a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate repeatedly throughout the summer does help to knock it down and eventually get rid of it. It's been found most effective to spray in May through July when the plant is in bloom and most susceptible. A different option is to cut the plant about 6 inches above the soil and paint glyphosate on the open wound. Another product that can be used is Brush-B-Gon. It's not recommended to use a lawn mower or weed whipper to knock the plants down as the plant parts will be airborne, and thus there is a higher probability that you may get a rash. Never under any circumstances burn an area with these plants in it; the irritants on the plant will get in your lungs and it can be fatal.

After Contact: As stated earlier, some people may not react when they first come in contact with the plant, but over time they will become more susceptible to it. If you know you were in contact with any of these plants, the first thing to do is wash any exposed skin with rubbing alcohol. Next, wash the skin with water. Once you have cleansed the skin with rubbing alcohol and water, take a shower with soap and water. Don't use soap before this, as it will bond with the oils and move it around the body. Typically, after you've been exposed to it once, you will notice redness and swelling in 12 to 48 hours. Without treatment, the rash and blisters disappear between 14 and 21 days. Your doctor will be able to tell you what medication to use to ease the itching and blistering.



Fall Color



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