

Poisonous Plants



in the Environment

The most common poisonous plants in the environment are:

- Poison ivy
- Poison oak
- Poison sumac

These all contain a substance called **urushiol** which causes adverse reactions in some people. Not everyone is allergic to this substance, so some will not experience any reaction if they come in contact with it. Someone who is allergic will have a range of reactions.

Reactions can occur through:

- Direct contact with the plant
- Indirect contact, such as touching tools, animals, or clothing that have urushiol on them
- Inhalation of particles containing urushiol from burning plant

Poison Ivy

- Always has leaves of three. Never any more
- Always grows left then right, never side by side.
- Never has thorns, but can have green-yellow or white berries
- Some ivy covers the ground, grows as a bush, or can climb up trees or walls.



Poison Oak

- Typically a shrub with leaves of three that look like oak leaves
- May have yellow or green flowers and clusters of green-yellow or white berries



Poison Sumac

- Woody shrub that has stems that contain 7-13 leaves arranged in pairs
- Red stems
- Leaves have smooth edges, NOT saw toothed leaves. This is called Staghorn Sumac and is not poisonous.
- May have glossy, pale yellow, or cream-colored berries



Symptoms

- Each plant causes a similar reaction in people allergic to urushiol.
- The most common reaction is a red, itchy rash. The rash will occur wherever the urushiol touches you whether directly from the plant or from objects that have touched the plant.
- The reaction usually develops 12 to 48 hours after exposure and typically lasts one to three weeks.
- The severity of the rash depends on the amount of urushiol that gets on your skin and how allergic you are to it.

When to See a Doctor

- Trouble breathing
- The reaction is severe or widespread
- The rash affects your face or genitals
- Blisters are oozing pus
- You develop a fever greater than 100 F (37.8 C)
- The rash doesn't get better within a few weeks



Prevention

- Do not touch parts of your body, clothing, pets, or objects that have into contact with the poison plant. **Wear gloves as you follow the next steps.**
 - Wash anything you think has been exposed as soon as possible. Wash exposed clothing separately in hot water with detergent.
 - After use, clean tools with rubbing alcohol, a dilute bleach solution, or soap with lots of water.
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, boots, and gloves when working outside.
- Barrier skin lotions containing bentoquatam may offer some protection before contact. Barrier creams should be washed off and reapplied twice a day.
- Remove poison ivy, oak, and sumac by spraying it with special weed killer, then dispose of it using gloves after it browns and dies. Wash all surfaces that touch it during removal.
- Do not burn plants that may be poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac. Inhaling smoke from burning plants can cause severe allergic respiratory reactions.

Note: Poison ivy is not contagious. The rash that appears is an allergic reaction. The only way you can get poison ivy is if you come into contact with the urushiol on uncleaned objects that have touched the plant or you touch the plant directly. If someone has poison ivy, oak, or sumac, the only way you can get it, too, is if they had not cleaned the areas of exposure before you had touched them. The rash itself is just an allergic reaction. It is the same thing as someone eating peanuts and breaking out in hives. Touching the hives does not make you get them.

First Aid

- Wash the skin thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 30 minutes.
 - The urushiol soaks into the skin quickly, so it takes a longer time to remove all of it. Wash objects and pets while wearing disposable gloves and wash clothes separately in warm, soapy water.
 - Scrub under nails with a brush to prevent spreading the urushiol.
- Apply wet compresses, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream to the skin to reduce itching and blistering.
 - Follow the directions on any creams and lotions. Do not apply to broken skin, such as open blisters.
- An antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can be taken to help relieve itching.
 - If children come in contact at any time, a pediatrician should be contacted to determine the appropriate dosage.
- Bathing in an oatmeal bath (available in drugstores) may relieve itching.
- In severe cases or if the rash is on the face or genitals, seek professional medical attention.
- Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room if there is swelling, difficulty breathing, or you have had a severe reaction in the past.