



Poison Ivy

Identification and Control

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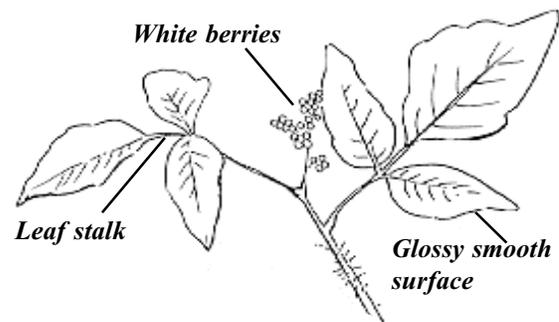
Each year we get numerous calls on controlling poison ivy. In nearly all cases the poison ivy plant is in a landscape situation and poses a threat to the property owner. A single vine growing in the wrong place can cause considerable irritation to people susceptible to the toxic oil *urushiol* found in the plant. In this situation the best way to prevent the painful experience of severe skin inflammation is first to learn how to identify this toxic plant and second minimize the chance of exposure.

Identification

Poison Ivy is a native woody species of Wisconsin. The habitats of this plant are many and varied. It is often found in wet places like ravines and near lakes and rivers, or in moist and sunny openings in pine hardwood forest. The weedy nature of this plant permits invasion along roads, railroads, lakeshores, floodplains and fence rows.

The stems of poison ivy are usually woody except when quite young. Poison ivy commonly grows as a vine, but if it has full sunlight it may grow as a shrub. Stems usually are simple or have sparse upright branches. The plant does not usually exceed 3 feet in height, although heights of 9 feet have been recorded. It produces rootstalks, and the many stems growing together on a single site may all be from a single plant.

To identify poison ivy heed the old adage, "Leaflets three let it be, berries white out of sight." The compound leaves of poison ivy are alternate on the stem. Each compound leaf is made up of three leaflets. Each leaflet is 2 to 4 inches long and is pointed at the tip. The leaflets may be glossy or dull green and usually have smooth surfaces. The edges of the leaflets vary considerably; some are toothed others are lobed. A characteristic typical of poison ivy is that the center leaflet is supported by a short leaf stalk, while the lateral leaflets are attached directly to the leaf stem.



The fruiting clusters of poison ivy are rather compact and stand erect and are found on the side of the stem immediately above a leaf. The grayish-white, waxy fruit is about 1/4 inch in diameter and has distinct lines marking the outer surface, somewhat like a peeled orange.

Control

Perhaps the best way to minimize the exposure to poison ivy is to eradicate the plant from the landscape in question. There are two options for eradicating poison ivy. One is mechanical and the other is a chemical. When deciding on which approach to use one must consider the risk of each approach. For most people the risk of dermatitis and severe skin irritation from the poison ivy is much greater the risk of using chemicals. As a result chemical control is the most common method for eradicating poison ivy.

Mechanical Control

Poison ivy can be removed by grubbing or hand pulling. This may be the only option in areas that contain valuable ornamentals, or in areas where chemicals cannot be applied. It is extremely important to wear protective clothing. Be especially careful of unprotected areas such as wrists, face and eyes. It is also important to decontaminate tools, and clothing to prevent prolonged exposure. Persons who are sensitive to poison ivy should not attempt hand methods for control. Roots and rootstocks can be removed most easily when the soil is thoroughly wet. Grubbing or pulling when the soil is dry and hard is almost futile because the roots and rootstocks break off in the ground, leaving large pieces that can sprout vigorously later.

Perhaps the only advantage of grubbing or hand pulling is that it does not require the use of a chemical. The biggest disadvantage to hand pulling of poison ivy is that it greatly increases the risk of exposure to the toxic oil *urushiol*. Another disadvantage is that disturbed soil from grubbing or hand pulling can cause erosion. This is of special concern on shore land property or on sites with a steep slope.

Mowing is generally not an effective means of controlling poison ivy. It has little effect on roots unless it is repeated frequently. Cutting plants and allowing the sap to be exposed can present considerable risk to those who might come in contact with it. Burning of poison ivy is also not recommended. The smoke from burning poison ivy can cause dermatitis and in some individuals can be fatal if the smoke is inhaled.

Chemical Control²

Poison ivy can be killed with herbicide with relatively little danger to the operator. The main hazard to the applicator is the danger of contacting the poison ivy. A number of herbicides are registered for use in controlling poison ivy. They vary in their effectiveness and some will kill poison ivy without killing grass. Other herbicides tend to kill all vegetation sprayed. Read the label carefully before using any herbicide!

One application of a herbicide usually does not kill all plants in a stand of poison ivy. Plants believed to be dead sometimes produce new shoots after several months. An area under treatment should be watched closely for at least a year and retreated as necessary.

There are a number of recommended chemicals for controlling poison ivy. These include, *2,4-D*, *Triclopyr*, *MCP*P, *glyphosate*, and *dicamba*. *Glyphosate* (Round-Up or Kleen-Up) is moderately effective for killing poison ivy. The herbicide is translocated throughout the plant and kills both roots and tops. *Glyphosate* is nonselective and will kill or severely injure most kinds of plants contacted by the spray. Use it carefully near shrubbery and flowers, and do not use it in areas with grass or other native vegetation that you wish to retain. Sprayed areas with *glyphosate* can be reseeded relatively soon after treatment. *Dicamba* is also effective in controlling poison ivy. This broadleaf herbicide is most effective when mixed with *2,4-D* and *MCP*P. Such a mixture is called Trimec, and is a common lawn herbicide. *Dicamba* should not be applied more than once a year under trees and shrubs. Other products that control poison ivy are Brush-B-Gon (triclopyr), Weed-B-Gon (*dicamba* *2,4-D* and *MCP*P), Weedmaster (*dicamba* and *2,4-D* premix) and Banvel (*dicamba*).

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²Reference to pesticide products are for your convenience and are not an endorsement. You are responsible for using pesticides according to the current label directions. Follow label directions exactly to protect yourself and the environment.