

## Removing Poison Ivy, Sumac and Oak

Q. I am extremely allergic to poison ivy, oak, and sumac what is the best way to get rid of it. If possible, I would like to get rid of it without killing all the good vegetation around it. Thank you.

A: This is an excellent question as poison ivy, oak, and sumac are all prolific this time of year. We have a few simple tips when dealing with these plants. The best protection is knowing what the plants look like and avoiding contact.

The University Georgia Extension also has an excellent article that provides comprehensive information on these poisonous plants.

[https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%20867-10\\_4.PDF](https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%20867-10_4.PDF)

It is a good rule of thumb is to always wear long pants, long sleeves, and gloves when gardening. That is particularly important if you may have these plants in your landscape. If you suspect contact has been made with poison ivy, oak, or sumac, wash all clothing, shoes, and tools before coming inside or touch contact with people or pets. There is a protective oil on these plants, called Urushiol oil, that causes the allergic reaction of which we are all familiar. It is easily passed from these plants to other objects like your gloves, clothes, gardening tools, and even seats in your car. Keep in mind that anyone and anything that comes in contact with the oils on these plants – including your pets – have the ability to spread the oil that causes the reaction.

Do not burn poison ivy! Again, NEVER burn poison ivy, oak, sumac, etc. The burned particles can be carried vast distances in smoke from burning these plants and can cause severe allergic reactions to people and animals that breathe it in or if it gets in the eyes. When disposing of any poison ivy or other “poison” plants, it is best to place in a plastic bag, tie, and place in your garbage.

Johns Hopkins Medicine has a helpful website to reference in preventing and treating poison ivy. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/allergens-poison-ivy--poison-oak>. *It is always important to see your physician when you have concerns or are having a severe allergic reaction to these plants.*

“If you have already come in contact with the plants, remove the oils from your skin as soon as possible. Do this by washing with ordinary soap. Repeat the cleaning with the soap at 3 times. There are also alcohol-based wipes that help remove the oils. Also wash all clothes and shoes because the oils can remain on them.”

To control poison ivy, oak, sumac in the landscape, you can dig up plants and roots as a control method in small beds of landscape ornamentals. Waterproof gloves and safety glasses should always be worn when handling poisonous plants (including the roots) to prevent contact with the poison and a significant allergic reaction. Another option is smothering it out by placing cardboard directly on the plant. This is a link that has instructions from UC Davis Arboretum specifically for controlling lawns, but the concept is the same with poisonous plants.

<https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/news/break-up-with-your-lawn-using-cardboard> Smothering it will take time, and the roots may have shoots beyond the cardboard. Persistence is the key to success with this method. Poison Ivy has an extensive root system and may take several tries to get rid of it.

Herbicide control methods include glyphosate, 2 4-D, and triclopyr. A small paint brush for application could be used to restrict application to only the poison plant and avoid killing plants you want to keep. Covering your other plants with cloth or plastic while applying these chemicals may also help to protect your ornamentals. You must always follow the manufacturer's recommendations on the product label when using chemical herbicides. Follow all manufacturer's recommended directions, restrictions, and precautions. Store herbicides in original containers and keep out of reach of children and pets. Take care to avoid herbicide residue coming into contact with animals after treatment. Remember that herbicides can drift or contaminate areas you are not treating. Any leftover pesticides or containers must be disposed of as directed on the label.

For additional questions regarding the use of herbicides, contact your local county extension agent. The following link will take you to contact information for University of Tennessee County Extension Offices in NE Tennessee. <https://www.netmga.net/ut-county-extension-offices-in-ne-tn/>

Most of us are familiar with those poison ivy, oak, sumac, etc. allergic reactions on some level. It can be a miserable time, but remember that however dangerous to humans, these plants do provide food for birds and have beautiful foliage in the fall. There is a place for all plants – even if it's not in your landscaping.

The Master Gardeners of Northeast Tennessee