

## **Re-Visiting Poison Ivy**

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Poison ivy is often seen growing on buildings, trees, or in fence rows as a vine, but can also be seen growing as a small shrub or “ground cover” in the woods or in waste areas. The best way to identify poison ivy is by the leaflets. The leaflets grow in clusters of three (“leaves of three, let it be”). These leaflets are from two to four inches long with pointed tips. The middle leaflet is usually larger than the others. The edges of the leaflets might be smooth, or they could have teeth. The leaflets are varying shades of green and turn to a reddish color in the fall.

All parts of the poison ivy plant, including the roots, stems, bark, and leaflets, are poisonous year-round. The blistering rash people get is caused by an oily toxin known as *urushiol*. Any time a plant is bruised or injured, the sap oozes from the plant and the potential for coming in contact with it exists. If you burn poison ivy, coming in contact with the smoke will also cause the allergic reaction. It is very important to avoid breathing the smoke. The sap can also be carried on pets (for up to two weeks on their hair), tools, or any other item which has been in contact with the plant.

If you come in contact with poison ivy, wash with cool soapy water within 20 minutes to remove the sap before it penetrates the skin. Hot or warm water may allow the sap to penetrate the skin quicker. Do this even if you wear gloves and protective clothing. After you put your clothes in the washer, wash your hands immediately.

The rash can appear from a few hours to several days later and is recognized by the fluid filled blisters it produces. Contrary to popular belief the rash is not spread by the fluid from these blisters. Generally, the rash will run its course in about two weeks. If your reaction is severe it may be necessary to see a doctor.

Poison ivy can be controlled by spraying the leaves and stems with a herbicide mixture that contains dicamba, triclopyr, or glyphosate. For situations where the plant is growing in or on a desirable plant glyphosate can be applied to the leaves using a sponge or “wick applicator”. Contact your local Extension agent for more information. Always follow the label.