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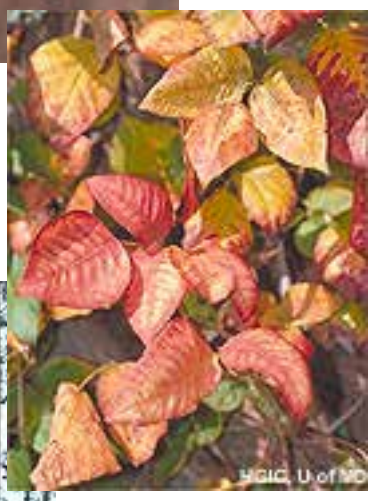
Poison Ivy

Introduction:

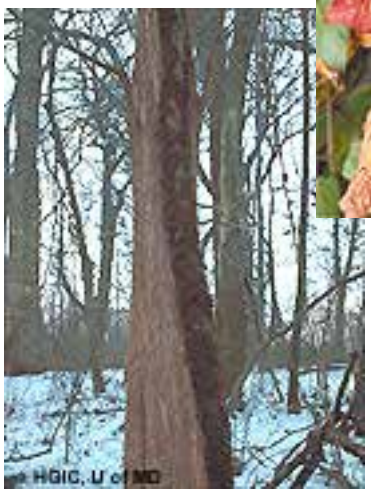
Poison Ivy, *Rhus (Toxicodendron) radicans,* is a common plant found in woodlands, fields, pastures, farms and home landscapes. Poison ivy is typically a deciduous woody vine, but can often take on different growth forms depending on its age and growing conditions. Old vines become thick and develop dark brown hairy holdfast growths. It typically grows in the form of a woody vine attached to trees or other objects for support. When growing in a tree, the vines often develop extensive branches that look like the branches of the tree. In some cases, it can also grow as an upright shrub without support. Shrub forms typically develop when grown in the full sun. The leaf forms also can vary even on the same plant. They all have the characteristic three leaflets but the leaf margins can be smooth, wavy, lobed, or toothed. Some leaves may resemble oak leaves. Many people call the leaf form that resembles oak leaves 'Poison Oak'. In reality, the true species of Poison Oak, *Rhus diversiloba* is found in the Western U.S. Most mature poison ivy plants will flower and produce fruit. The small flowers and white waxy fruits are in clusters on slender stems that originate in the axis of the leaves along the side of the smaller branches.

Some people are more sensitive than others to the effects of poison ivy. However, sensitivity can change from time to time so that someone who was not affected by it at one time can get a reaction at another time. The entire plant is poisonous because all parts contain the irritating oil urushiol. Urushiol (pronounced, 'you-roos-sheol') is a colorless or slightly yellow oil found in the leaves, stems and roots. This oil is very potent. Even dead plants may cause allergic reactions for a couple of years. If burned, the oils in the smoke can also cause severe allergic reactions. The oil penetrates the skin in about ten minutes of contact. Allergic reactions may take up to two weeks for symptoms to appear and skin-to-plant contact is not necessary for a reaction to occur. The plants are most dangerous in spring and summer when oil content is highest. The oil can remain active for months on objects. It can be picked up on tools, clothing and the fur of pets. Therefore, anything that may be carrying the oil should be carefully washed. For those sensitive to the oil, a linear rash, resembling small insect bites, will appear within 12 to 48 hours, but a reaction can take up to two weeks to occur. This rash develops into a more severe rash and blisters. Washing with running water is recommended. Washing with soaps that contain oils, such as complexion soaps, can actually spread the irritating oil and make the rash more widespread. There is a

Poison Ivy Berries



Poison Ivy Fall Colors



Poison Ivy Vine

specially prepared cleansing agent on the market called TECNU that removes the rash-causing oil, if applied within 4-8 hours of contact.

Common Myths about Poison Ivy

1. Scratching poison ivy blisters will spread the rash. This is not true. The irritating oil is spread by hand only before the rash begins.

2. Poison ivy rash is catching from one person to another. This is not true. The rash cannot be transferred from person to person.

3. Once allergic, always allergic. False. An individual's sensitivity can change over time even from season to season.

4. "Leaves of three, let them be". This is usually true for poison ivy, but occasionally its leaves may be in groups of 5,7 or even 9. There are a few plants that also have three leaflets very similar to poison ivy. For example, the harmless boxelder tree looks very similar to poison ivy.

Controlling Poison Ivy

Poison ivy grows fairly quickly and propagates itself by underground rhizomes and seeds. The seeds are quickly spread by birds and other animals that eat the small fruits. Poison ivy can get started in the landscape from a seed dropped by a bird and in short time become a wide spread problem. It often grows in shrubs and groundcovers making it difficult to spot. For light infestations, digging, and hand pulling of small plants is effective. Spot spraying the foliage with a non-selective herbicide containing glyphosate (Round-Up, Kleen-Up) or a poison ivy killer on the market may be necessary. Always wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when working around poison ivy. Use protective gloves. Disposable plastic gloves are ideal. Launder the clothing separately from the family laundry. Heavy growths of poison ivy should never be removed by hand because of the obvious hazard. Spray these areas with a non-selective herbicide or poison ivy killers. Use these with care to protect other plants from being harmed by the spray.

Control with chemicals is most effective during active growth especially in early to mid summer. The chemicals are most efficiently absorbed and translocated through the plant at these times.

USE INSECTICIDES WITH CARE. READ THE LABEL DIRECTIONS. FOLLOW ALL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.

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