Poison Ivy and Poison Oak

Poison Ivy Vine

Poison Oak

Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is commonly found in most parts of Oklahoma. The plant contains a toxic compound named "Urushiol" which acts as an irritant to the skin and mucus membrane (eyes, nose, and mouth). This toxin is found in all parts of the plant, roots, leaves, and stem and is present even in winter.

Poison ivy is a vine that typically grows up trees but, when a seedling, can also grow along the ground. Plants can be identified from other native vines and shrubs by their compound leaflets that are always in groups of three, thus the old saying, "leaves of three….leave it be". Poison ivy is green in the summer and changes color in the fall. The roots of the plant grow along the vine and can be seen up against the tree. It has white berries.

If you find poison ivy in your yard or in a wooded lot, be very careful with removing the plant. If you decide to dig it out, wear gloves. Using a herbicide is likely your best defense. Several brands of herbicide are effective for poison ivy,

and most contain either glyphosate (Roundup) or triclopyr. While both are effective, triclopyr seems to offer better control.

Snip the vine off close to the ground and spray with herbicide, being careful not to spray surrounding plants. Be careful when disposing leaves and vines of poison ivy or poison oak. **DO NOT BURN THEM!** The toxin can be carried in the smoke, entering the mouth, nose, and lungs. Wear long pants when walking in the woods if you suspect poison ivy or poison oak in that area. Shoes and gloves used in the cleanup can carry the residue of Urushiol for up to five years and should be thoroughly cleaned before entering your home. Do not allow children to play in the area until complete cleanup has occurred.

Poison Oak

Poison oak is a shrub that can be 1 - 6 feet high and is typically found in sunnier spots. It looks a lot like poison ivy, but the leaves are usually duller green and hairy on both sides and can be undulated. The good news is that poison oak is fairly rare in Oklahoma; it is more commonly found east of here. We do have a variety in our state, the Atlantic Poison Oak, but it is not nearly as common as poison ivy.

Poison Sumac

There is a third plant in the "poison" group called poison sumac. It is also rare in Oklahoma and more common to the southern and eastern coastal states.

People differ in their sensitivity to these poison plants. One person may be able to tolerate brief contact while others can develop a severe rash from casually brushing up against the plant. Both poison ivy and poison oak share similarities and both have the capacity to cause severe allergic reactions in about 85% of the population. So, if you have contact with either plant, wash exposed skin immediately with soap and water, which can decrease the severity of the rash. Scrub your hand with close attention to your fingernails as you could still have

residue under your nails and then spread the toxin to other parts of your body by scratching.

If a rash develops, you may treat it with Calamine lotion, Hydrocortisone, or an antihistamine. Call you primary care physician if the rash is large or is near your eyes. Call 911 of for a severe reaction such as difficulty breathing or throat swelling.

More information on poison ivy and poison oak can be found by clicking HERE.