

Leaves of Three Leave Them Be...

“Leaves of three, leave them be” is a simple way to avoid the Big 3 culprits that cause a miserable, red, itchy rash - and not just in the good old summertime. All parts of these plants are toxic all year round. Urushiol, the toxic oil that we react to, is found in all parts of these plants. It can get on skin, clothes, shoes, and pet fur. Clean all tools, gloves, and clothing that come in contact with these plants with strong soap to remove the oil.



Poison Ivy

The most common in our area is poison ivy (*Toxicodendron Radicans*). It is a small woodland plant found throughout

Oklahoma and most of the U.S. It is less common in the panhandle and far southwest regions of Oklahoma. Poison ivy will grow almost anywhere. It is common along rural roadsides, in fencerows, and in forested areas in parks and golf courses. It grows in flowerbeds, trees, and shrubs around our homes. As a vine, it climbs fences, utility poles and trees. If there is no tree or other support to climb, it will grow along the ground or upright like a shrub. It blends in well and may be hard to spot.

Poison ivy has three leaflets on a stem that are typically greenish red in early spring, dark green through summer and turn red, orange, or yellow in the fall. It has small waxy, cream-colored fruits that later turn white. Every fruit contains a seed, which is eaten and spread by birds and other wildlife. Virginia Creeper is a harmless, similar looking *five-leaved* plant that often grows side by side with poison ivy and is commonly mistaken for it.



Poison Oak

Poison oak is more common in the eastern and western coastal states but can be found in Oklahoma. The edges of the leaves of the three are more rounded and not as sharp as poison ivy.

Poison Sumac

Poison Sumac is occasionally found in the Red River valley in Oklahoma. It prefers wet, heavily forested areas in the eastern and southeastern U.S.

Control

Cultural controls, such as hand pulling or hoeing will only work if *all* underground roots (rhizomes) are completely removed. Never burn any part of poison ivy, oak, or sumac, as smoke will carry the oil droplets. These oils can stay active for years in dry leaves and vines so be sure to put all related debris in the trash, NOT in the compost pile.

There are several herbicides available at your local garden store that will eradicate these plants over time. Always read and follow all directions on the pesticide label.

Products containing triclopyr are good for well-established poison ivy. Herbicides that contain a combination of dicamba and 2,4-D are another excellent choice. Triclopyr, dicamba, and 2,4-D are all selective herbicides that only kill broadleaf plants such as poison ivy and can be used without harm to

grasses. Even so, they should not be used where they may come in contact with delicate plants.

Glyphosate can be used for spot treating in late spring through mid-summer. Cut the vines to six inches above ground and apply directly to the fresh cut. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide will kill grasses as well as broadleaf weeds such as poison ivy so care must be taken when using near trees, shrubs, flowers, or other desirable plants.

Selective or non-selective herbicides should be used during periods of rapid poison ivy growth. For the best results, apply them just before the plant is blooming. These plants are tough perennials with thick, woody rootstocks so new sprouts and re-growth are likely. You may need to re-apply pesticide during this growing season and possibly the next to completely eradicate them.

www.tulsamastergardeners.org, is a great place to learn about your plants and their common problems. You can get answers to your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center at 4116 East 15th Street in Tulsa or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.

Sources:

[HLA-6459 Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, and Similar Plant Identification](#)

[E-832 2019 Extension Agent's Handbook](#)

[E-1034 Master Gardener's Manual](#)

University of Missouri Extension "Poison Ivy: Identification and Control"