

Work Safely Around Poison Ivy

Western poison ivy (*Toxicodendron rydbergii*) and common poison ivy (*T. radicans*) are native woody, perennial plants. Sap from this group of plants contains urushiol (oil) and a large segment of the human population has been exposed and has developed or may develop sensitivity (allergic reactions) to urushiol. All parts of the poison ivy plant contain urushiol and humans are typically poisoned through direct contact with broken plant parts. The resulting allergic reaction typically results in redness and blistering accompanied by itching sensations. Upon contact with sap precautions must be taken quickly, within ten minutes, to prevent poison ivy injuries. People working outdoors are at risk and should be able to identify poison ivy during all seasons.



June, flowering and new early season growth of western poison ivy.

Identification

Plant: Western poison ivy is a woody, low growing shrub, 1 to 4 feet tall. In southeastern Minnesota, common poison ivy can be a vine up to 60 feet or shrub to 10 feet. Stems are light colored tan with light brown buds. Often cream-colored fruit may be present.

Leaves: Alternate, compound leaves. Three leaflets, often shiny, edges coarsely toothed, notched, or almost smooth. Central leaflet is on a longer stalk than those on the side.

Fall foliage can be brilliant orange to red.

Flower: Flowers are often hidden from view by foliage. A dioecious species with male and female flowers on separate plants. Clusters of small 5-parted, greenish flowers are produced from leaf axils. Female plants produce ¼ inch, creamy white, berry-like fruit that persists into winter.

Fruit is present in September and is a good winter identification characteristic. It may persist into the next growing season.

Bloom time varies from June through July (typically 1-2 months late spring to mid-summer).



"Leaves of three, leave them be."



Fruit (seeds) in February and early May leaf out.

Working safely around poison ivy.

- People have different levels of sensitivity (allergic reaction). An individual may become more sensitive.
- You can touch and/or brush past poison ivy without causing sap flow; thus, no exposure to sap.
- Poison ivy sap contains an oil (urushiol). Many soaps with water or plain water **do not** effectively remove the oil; thus, **do not** prevent injury. Degreasers or products designed to remove urushiol are a better choice.
- Research has shown that in order to prevent injury poison ivy oils should be removed within ten minutes of exposure.
- Keep in mind, oils can persist for days (years on some surfaces) resulting in latent exposures and latent reactions. Therefore, besides good hygiene, cleaning tools and other gear is also important.

Urushiol, an oil, can also adhere to pet fur and can be present in soil, float on water or be carried on particulate matter in smoke from fires.

Proper clothing: Boots, long sleeves, long pants and good gloves. Cover the gap between glove and sleeve!

Laundering clothing: Recommendations are mixed on washing contaminated clothing. If sensitive people are in the household, err on the side of caution and wash contaminated items separately.

Avoid wiping sap onto your bare skin: Mosquitos, flies and other biting insects may have you swatting and or itching your bare face. If there is sap on your hand or glove - it will be effectively transferred to exposed skin.

Removing plants: Effective removal can be accomplished with a shovel or similar cutting tool.

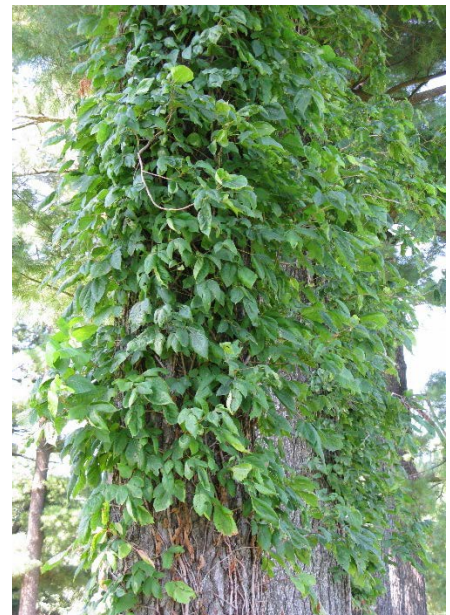
Mowing or cutting: Effectively knocks height down, but does not kill plants. Use caution around green, still moist plant material. Use caution around cut stems that may still ooze sap from cut surfaces.

Do not pile and burn! Urushiol can be carried on smoke particulate with the potential to be inhaled causing injury to airways.

In southeastern Minnesota common poison ivy vines may climb into trees - use caution when vines are present in felled tree parts.

Soils: Urushiol is likely present in soils beneath poison ivy infestations. Once the above ground plant parts (leaves berries, and stems) are removed, keep workers out of soil (roots and contaminated soil) with plywood sheeting, mats, temporary decking, mulch layer or any surface to allow workers to preform duties safely.

Herbicide: Consider treatments one year in advance of work. Given time herbicide applications will kill plants. However, remaining plant material, soil, and roots below ground should be considered contaminated with urushiol and potentially injurious.



Common poison ivy (T. radicans) vines clinging to a tree trunk in Central Iowa

For more information

Visit: www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/vegetation

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