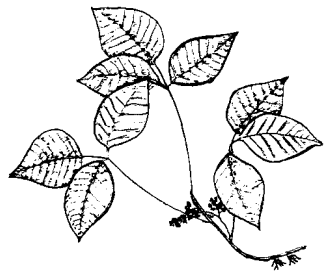




# Effective Control of Poison-Ivy



April 1997

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## Description

Poison-ivy (*Rhus radicans L.*) is a climbing plant of the sumac family and can be found in every province except Newfoundland. It grows on sandy, stony or rocky shores, sprouts in thickets, in clearings and along the borders of woods. This glossy perennial can spread by seed or by producing shoots from its extensive underground stems (rhizomes).

The sap of the plant contains an oily resin that causes an irritating inflammation of the skin in most people. All parts of the plant, including the roots, contain this poisonous resin. Most people develop symptoms 24 to 48 hours after contact. The extent of a reaction depends on the individual's sensitivity and the amount of sap in contact with the skin.

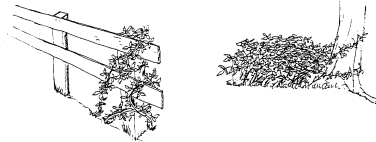
The compound leaves of poison-ivy consist of three pointed leaflets; the middle leaflet has a much longer stalk than the two side ones. The leaflet edges can be smooth or toothed but are rarely lobed. The leaves vary greatly in size, from 8 to 55 mm in length. They are reddish when they emerge in the spring, turn green during the summer, and become various shades of yellow, orange or red in the autumn.

The plant stems are woody and of two kinds. The most frequent kind grows as a trailing vine, with upright leafy stalks 10 to 80 cm high. The second kind is an aerial vine that may climb from 6 to 10 m high on trees, posts or rough surfaces.



Types of Leaves

The plant produces clusters of cream to yellow-green inconspicuous flowers during the months of June and July. The berries that appear by September are clustered, globular, waxy, and green-to-yellow in colour. The size of the berries ranges from 3 to 7 mm in diameter. They often remain on the low, leafless stems of the plant all winter.



Aerial Vine Trailing Vine

## Effects of Poison-Ivy

The oily resin can be found in the roots, stems, leaves and fruit. It causes an irritating inflammation of the skin, called Rhus-dermatitis or poison-ivy dermatitis. The inflamed areas frequently develop blisters which are accompanied by intense itchiness. Contact with any broken part of the plant may cause a reaction in some individuals. The rash spreads by exposure to the sap and not from the sores themselves. Therefore, an individual has to actually come into contact with the sap before developing an allergic reaction.

## Treatment in Case of Skin Contact

Areas of skin that are suspected of contamination should be carefully washed with soap and cold water. Cold water should be used because hot water tends to open the pores of the epidermal layer; the heat would increase the chances of the resin being deeply absorbed into

the skin. If soap is not available, vinegar (2 tablespoons in 1 cup of water) or alcohol (1/2 cup to 1/2 cup of water) can be substituted.

It is important to note that these practices may not prevent a reaction, but will likely prevent the infection from spreading.

If a reaction does develop, one should seek the advice of a physician for proper treatment. Skin irritation (itching, red inflammation, blistering of the skin and, in severe cases, oozing sores) resulting from exposure to poison-ivy normally disappears in a week to 10 days.

## Similar Plants

Poison-ivy is often mistaken for similar plants such as poison oak and poison sumac. These can also cause Rhus-dermatitis. When in doubt, avoid touching an unknown plant until it has been clearly identified.

## Control of Poison-Ivy

**Remember: always wear gloves.**

### Protective Clothing

When working in or near poison-ivy, always wear protective clothing to ensure that no area of the skin is exposed to the sap of the plant.

Poison-ivy sap can adhere for long periods to clothing, tools, and the hair coats of pets and livestock. Under hot, humid conditions the sap becomes inactive in about a week. If conditions are dry, it can retain its harmful effect for a long period.

Any clothing worn while working in or near poison-ivy should be carefully removed, washed in hot, soapy water, and hung outside to dry for several days. Remember to wear gloves while handling objects that may be contaminated. Do not wash clothing suspected of contamination with other laundry in order to avoid any further contamination. Repeated washing may be necessary.

### Cultivation

For effective control of poison-ivy, the reproductive capacities of the plant can be disrupted by destroying its roots and stems. By digging out and hand picking the roots and stems, and working the soil frequently, the ability of the plant to produce shoots will be minimized. Repeated cultivation will eventually eliminate poison-ivy because the plant does not regenerate easily from plant fragments. Since loose seeds may be difficult to detect, remove any dead plant material from the ground in case some seeds are still attached to the stems.

### Chemical Control

Applying herbicides to control poison-ivy can be effective. One single treatment may be sufficient but it is possible for regrowth to occur. It may be necessary to repeat the treatment as often as regrowth appears.

Applying herbicides by spot-treatment will help to minimize the chances of the product drifting onto desirable vegetation. Herbicide spot treatment is also advisable when poison-ivy is a lawn weed.

### Available Herbicides

Domestic class products available to homeowners for the control of poison-ivy will

usually contain one, or will consist of a mixture, of the following active ingredients: amitrole, simazine, ammonium sulfamate, glyphosate, 2,4-D, mecoprop, or dicamba.

Domestic pesticides can usually be purchased through garden centres or hardware stores.

Purchase only those products whose labels indicate poison-ivy control.

## Disposal

**CAUTION: DO NOT BURN POISON-IVY** as this may release the poison in the form of tiny droplets carried by the ash and dust particles in the smoke. A severe reaction may occur if a sensitive person inhales or is exposed to this smoke.

Dead poison ivy plants can still cause dermatitis and must be handled with care. Dispose of them by placing them in a garbage bag. Make sure that bags containing poison-ivy remains are well identified and disposed of with the household garbage.

Another method is to bury the remains deep into the ground. Sufficient depth is important to ensure there is no regrowth.



*Clusters of Fruits*



## Remember

### *Before Purchasing a Pesticide Product*

- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods and alternatives to pesticides.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions before buying the product. The label must include the name of the pest to be controlled and the treatment location (e.g., indoor, outdoor, garden uses, pet treatment).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.
- Alternatively, you may choose to hire a licensed pest control operator.

### *When Using a Pesticide*

- Carefully read all label instructions and precautions before using pesticides.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while applying pesticides.
- Persons and pets should vacate the area during treatment. Cover or remove aquaria.
- If kitchen area is to be treated, cover or remove food, dishes and utensils.

### *After Handling a Pesticide*

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any pesticide product.
- Do not permit persons or pets to contact treated surfaces until residue has dried completely.
- Provide adequate ventilation of treated areas after use.
- Wipe clean all surfaces that comes in direct contact with food, such as counters, tables and stovetops, including indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- Always store pesticides out of reach of children and pets and away from food and beverages.

### *In Case of Accidental Poisoning*

- Call a poison control centre immediately and seek medical attention.
- Take the pesticide container or label with you to the emergency facility or physician.
- Follow first aid statements on the label.
- In case of accidental poisoning of pets seek veterinary attention immediately.



### *When Disposing of Pesticides*

Do not reuse empty pesticide containers. Wrap and dispose of in household garbage.

Unused or partially used pesticide products should be disposed of at provincially or municipally designated household hazardous waste disposal sites.

### *Use Common Sense*

- These are general recommendations.
- Consult the label for specific instructions.
- When in doubt, contact a professional.

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