

# Poison Ivy Fact Sheet

Poison ivy grows in woods, fields and along roadsides and riverbeds. It can be a high-climbing woody vine, a small low-growing shrub or ground cover. Poison ivy grows in every region of the United States except the Southwest, Hawaii and Alaska.



## **Distinguishing Characteristics – “Leaves of three let them be”**

- Three thin, pointy and shiny leaves; however, the shape, texture and color of leaves can vary.
- Leaves are reddish in spring, green in summer and orange, red or bronze in the fall.

Jennifer Anderson @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Databasepdfd

## **Toxicity**

- Most people are sensitive to the oily resin or sap of poison ivy (urushiol). Urushiol is found year round in all parts of the plant including the roots, stems, flowers and leaves.
- Animals are not sensitive to poison ivy, but people can get poison ivy from an animal’s hair or fur.

## **Potential Exposures**

- Exposures are more common in the spring and summer.
- A person can get a rash by touching any part of the poison ivy plant or anything that has come in contact with poison ivy and still has the oily resin on it. Examples include sporting or camping equipment, gardening tools, shoes, clothes and pets or contaminated surfaces.
- Contact with fluid-filled blisters that develop does not spread poison ivy.
- Smoke from burning poison ivy can cause irritation to the eyes, skin, nose and throat and difficulty breathing. This irritation can sometimes be severe.

## **Symptoms**



- A rash may develop between 1 hour and 5 days after contact. The rash can vary in severity and usually starts with itching, redness and swelling sometimes followed by tiny pimples or blisters.
- Delayed symptoms may appear if skin comes in contact with contaminated items or surfaces.

## **Treatment**

- Immediately after exposure (within 10-15 minutes) wash exposed areas, including nails, with cool water and soap.
- Wash contaminated surfaces with rubbing alcohol and clothes and shoes with hot water and soap.
- See your health care provider if symptoms are severe or persist and for treatment advice.
- If you experience difficulty breathing, swelling in the throat, dizziness or weakness call 911.

## **Prevention**

- Learn to recognize poison ivy and avoid exposure.
- Always wear vinyl gloves when removing plants (urushiol can penetrate rubber).
- Wear long pants, long sleeves, socks, closed shoes, hat when walking in areas with poison ivy.
- Do not burn poison ivy.

**Contact the Northern New England Poison Center for information or questions at 1-800-222-1222 or visit [www.nnepc.org](http://www.nnepc.org).**