

Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, and Poison Sumac

Look out for poisonous plants, their green leaves blend right in with other plants, brush and foliage so it is possible to sit down in a patch of poison ivy and not even know it. Fortunately, Poison Oak rarely occurs in Oklahoma and Poison Sumac is not found here at all but rather in the swampy parts of our Southeast neighbors and the peat bogs of the Northeast and Midwest. According to Lee McGoodwin, Managing Director of the Oklahoma Poison Control Center, “Poison Ivy is usually a cause of itching skin rashes in Oklahoma from early spring until frost.”

Poison Ivy may look different depending on the time of year. Early in the year it may look like a small shrub, and then later Poison Ivy begins to make a vine. In the summer, leaves are green then turn red in the fall.



About 500 people could itch from the amount of Poison Ivy oil covering the head of a pin. What causes that pesky Poison Ivy itch; a chemical found in the sap of poison ivy, oak and sumac called urushiol (pronounced *oo-roo-shee-ohhl*) Urushiol oil may remain on any surface, including dead plants, and cause problems for up to five years. Urushiol can stick to pets, garden tools, balls, or anything that it touches. If you are allergic and come into contact with the sap, a skin rash may start within a few hours to 2 days. The rash usually goes away in 14-20 days without any treatment but this time seems much longer to the millions of people who suffer from the pain and itching of Poison Ivy.

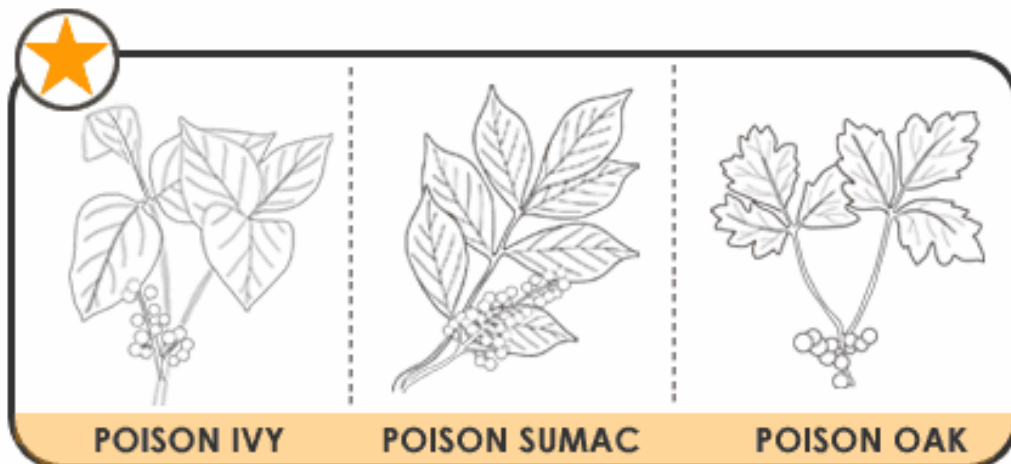
Wash with warm, soapy water as soon as possible after first contact with Poison Ivy. Washing may not stop the rash if more than 10 minutes has passed but it can help stop spreading. Wash any clothes and gardening equipment you think

may have touched the sap. You cannot get Poison Ivy from another person's rash or blisters. You can only get a rash from touching the sap. Try not to scratch your rash since this can cause infection. Blisters and itching will often occur within 48 hours of the exposure. Antihistamine creams do not help itching and they can even make the rash worse. For the temporary relief of itching, the FDA considers over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams to be safe and useful if started before blisters form. There are many products that can help to dry up the blisters such as baking soda, oatmeal bath, calamine lotion, and zinc oxide to name a few. Managing Director, Lee McGoodwin, advises that, "You see a doctor in severe cases or where the rash is on most of the face, genitals, or covers more than 25% of the body." Remember, if you are traveling in areas where Poison Oak or Poison Sumac are found, then do the same things as you would for a Poison Ivy rash.

To avoid these plants, know what they look like:

- Poison Ivy has shiny green leaves that normally grow in groups of three, but can vary from groups of three - nine. The three leaflets are all on the same small stem which branches off the main stem. The leaves are green in the summer and red in the fall with yellow or green flowers and white berries. It may grow as a vine or as a low shrub. Poison Ivy can be a woody, ropelike vine, a trailing shrub on the ground, or a freestanding shrub.
- Poison oak also usually has leaves grouped in three. It grows as a low shrub, which may have clusters of yellow berries. Along the Pacific coast it grows to 6-foot-tall clumps or vines up to 30 feet long.

Avoid contact with these plants by wearing long pants, long sleeves and gloves when working in the yard. The use of barrier creams may be helpful in keeping the urushiol oil from coming in contact with the skin. When camping or hiking in the woods, stay on well traveled trails. Contact with or breathing the smoke from burning poison ivy, oak, or sumac can cause a reaction. Do not burn poison ivy, oak, or sumac.



For more information visit the Oklahoma Poison Control Center's web site at www.oklahomapoison.org or call 405-271-5062. Free educational materials can be ordered through the web site such as the *First aid for Poisoning* and *Home Check List* brochures. The Oklahoma Poison Control Center is a program of the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy at the Children's Hospital at OU MEDICAL CENTER