

Weed Information Sheet:



RED HEAD Ecological Consulting

poison ivy

Toxicodendron radicans

AKA: *Rhus radicans*, Eastern poison ivy

Anacardiaceae (Cashew family)

Identification:

common Perennial vine

Height: 1' to 3' Width: ∞

Leaf Arrangement: alternate

Flower: Green, White, Cream

Blooms: Mid-spring to Late spring

Fruit: White berry Fall Color: Burgundy, Red, Orange

Poison ivy is a native woody vine and member of the sumac family. It can be found in shady and sunny sites rambling along the ground, forming a small shrub, or climbing up trees. The vines attach to surfaces by means of thin aerial roots which grow along the length of the stem. The plant always has three leaflets, though the serrations and lobes at the edges of these leaflets can vary. Often, the outer two leaves look roughly like mittens with the central leaf resembling a mitten with two thumbs. Young leaves are often glossy and maroonish. The attractive fall foliage can range from brick to fire-engine red.

There is a related species known as western poison ivy (*Toxicodendron rydbergii*), which is overall similar, but it lacks areal roots and therefore does not form climbing vines, instead it can grow into small shrubs up to 3' (rarely taller) and which has leaf margins that are more heavily lobed. This species generally grows in well-drained sandy soils in our region.





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Habitat:

Poison ivy can be found in a wide variety of habitats, often shady but they can grow in full sun as well. They can become especially abundant in habitats that have frequent disturbance, both natural and human included, such as river floodplains or historically-grazed woodlands.



Hazardous

Description & Impact:

The primary harm from poison ivy is of course that many people are allergic to the urushiol oil found in poison ivy. This allergy causes inflamed, itchy, oozing rashes on skin which can last for weeks. Roughly 15-30% of people are not allergic to urushiol at all, though the allergy can develop after to frequent contact. About 25% of people will have a severe immune response requiring medical attention. Because the oil is spread easily, contact with boots, pants, other gear and people can spread the oil, and thus the rash, even to people that weren't out in the woods.

With all that said, humans are the only animals that have an allergy to poison ivy. The foliage is preferred forage for deer and the berries are fat-rich, making them a good food source for songbirds and game birds. Red banded hairstreak butterfly caterpillars feed on the foliage.

Control Methods:

Manual: In sandy or wet soils the rope-like roots can be pulled up but this presents an extreme risk of exposure to urushiol oil.

Mechanical: Since this is a native species, although somewhat weedy, control should be limited to situations where it presents a risk to people. Regular mowing can suppress this species but will spread urushiol all over the mowing equipment. Vines that are climbing up trees can be cut close to the ground and the upper portion of the plant will die, though it will inevitably resprout from the base.

Chemical: A foliar spray of the commonly available glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) is effective, but multiple treatments might be necessary. Triclopyr (Garlon®, Brush-B-Gon® etc.) has been shown to be particularly effective and will not kill grasses.

One technique that is useful when poison ivy is mixed with desirable vegetation is the leaf spritz technique. Using an ester formulation of triclopyr (such as Garlon® 4) mixed in mineral oils at a ratio of about 1 part of the concentrated herbicide mix and 4 parts mineral oil. Then just spritz a few drops on the upper leaves of the poison ivy. The oil solution will absorb into the leaves and translocate down to kill the roots.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Citations: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urushiol-induced_contact_dermatitis