

# Leaves of Three, Beware of Thee

If you are one of the 25% of the population who does not develop an allergic reaction to Poison Ivy (*Rhus Radicans*), consider yourself very lucky. Otherwise, first and foremost, learn how to identify the plant **before** you experience an allergic reaction. Second, avoid it, alive or dead, in the summer, winter, spring or fall. Third, know how to treat an exposure. It can mean the difference between 3 weeks of pure misery or just an annoying skin irritation. Unfortunately, as gardeners, many times the light of recognition goes on just about the same time your hands are around the stem pulling it out of the garden bed.



Poison Ivy grows in many forms. It can be a bush, a vine, ground cover or just one small plant. "Leaves of three, beware of thee", refer to the three leaflets, either dull or glossy green (summer) usually with a red center where the three leaflet stems meet, each leaflet approximately 2"- 4" long.

The leaflets have irregular teeth and/or lobes. It grows anywhere and everywhere and is commonly found along the side of the road, creeping up a telephone pole or tree, at the edge of a meadow or in and around the garden.

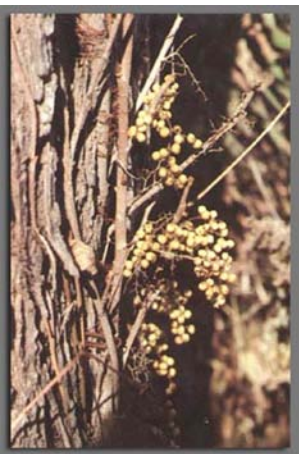


Your body reacts to the urushiol oil that is secreted from the leaf of the plant. The oil can stay potent and cause an allergic reaction for up to a year or more. If you do come in contact with Poison Ivy, wash your skin

immediately, within 20-30 minutes of exposure. Wash your hands first, wash the exposed area, and then wash your hands again. Many people avoid using warm water, as this may open your pores, allowing

the urushiol oil easier access into your skin.

Although there are commercial brands of skin cleaners specifically designed for use after exposure to Poison Ivy, such as Technu and Zandol, a very expensive, semi-abrasive scrub, Palmolive dishwashing liquid works just as well.



The skin reaction is self limiting, lasting around 3 weeks. In lieu of using oral steroids, a combination of herbal and homeopathic items lessens the length of time of the skin reaction and reduces the intense itch associated with the allergic reaction. Take **Hyland's Poison/Ivy Oak** which contains *Rhus Tox 6x* (micro-dose of Poison Ivy), every 2-3 hours for the first few days after developing itchy bumps. Also swab the area with **Tea Tree Oil**, a topical, herbal treatment at least twice a day. To get temporary relief of the intense itch, hold the skin area with the rash under running water as hot as you can stand (usually about a minute). You will feel an intense itch as the hot temperature brings the histamine to the surface of the skin and dissipates. This relief lasts for a few hours and can be repeated as many times as needed. Applying a topical steroid cream also helps. Recognize and avoid the plant is a lot easier.

Nature has provided a cure in the plant **Jewel Weed** (*Impatiens Capensis*) which is usually found growing near the Poison Ivy plant.

This is the beauty and the beast of nature; wherever nature places a poison, she usually places the cure nearby. This is a well known folk-remedy which relieves the itch, stops the spread, helps in healing the rash, and has absolutely no side-effects. The juice from the stems and leaves can be extracted. If you are in the woods and are exposed to Poison Ivy, crush the stems of Jewel Weed and apply it



directly to the exposed area of the skin. The juice is

somewhat sticky and stays in place. To keep it on hand all year, shred the stems and roots and boil them in water for 15 – 30 minutes, making a tea. Freeze them as ice cubes and rub them on infected areas when needed.

The search and destroy method works well. Pull Poison Ivy plants from the yard when they are small. When gardening, protect your hand and arm by slipping on a plastic sleeve from the



newspaper delivery and drop the plants into a grocery bag. Always take a shower, no matter how tired you are and throw the clothes you wore in the wash. However, it's easier to recognize and avoid it.

Taking a prophylactic dose of *Rhus Tox* at the beginning of the season (4 - 30x pills one day a week for 4 weeks), then once a month during the summer, helps with seasonal immunity and will lessen any reaction after exposure.