

# FACT SHEET

L-1847

## HOW TO AVOID POISON IVY

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For many people, poison ivy problems accompany the arrival of spring. Some people are more sensitive than others, and no one is fully immune. The first symptoms, itching and burning, may develop a few hours after exposure to the plant, or they may appear after 5 days or longer.

Poison ivy grows throughout Texas, particularly along streams and in moist, shady places. The danger from poisoning is greatest in the spring and summer, even though poisoning can occur in fall and winter.

Although all parts of poison ivy plants are toxic, contact with the sap causes the strongest effects. Even small amounts of the plant's toxic agent, urushiol, can cause skin inflammation. The toxin can be transferred from one object to another by pets which have run through poison ivy plants. Smoke from burning poison ivy plants also carries the toxin and can cause serious inflammation.

### Identification

Poison ivy, a perennial, native plant that grows during warm seasons, belongs to the sumac genus of the cashew family. Three varieties of poison ivy, *Rhus toxicodendron*, grow in Texas.

The most widespread variety is common poison ivy, which has glossy green leaves with smooth margins. Other varieties have lobed or toothed leaf margins resembling oak leaves, thus the nickname is poison oak. Poison ivy grows as a vine, shrub or small tree. The leaves are always divided into three leaflets. This is the basis for the old saying, "Leaflets three, let it be."

Oakleaf poison ivy usually grows lower than the smooth-leaved variety. Clusters of inconspicuous white flowers rise from the axis of the leaves. The plants develop white, waxy berries with distinct lines marking their outer surfaces into segments which resemble those of peeled oranges.

### Prevention

To prevent inflammation from poison ivy, follow these precautions:

- Avoid contact with poison ivy plant.
- Keep pets away from poison ivy plants. The

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toxin can remain on the pets' feet and fur for several days and be transferred to humans.

- Do not burn poison ivy plant parts.
- Wash contaminated clothing thoroughly and separately.
- Wash any contaminated part of the body thoroughly with soap and water within 5 to 10 minutes after contact with poison ivy.
- Several nonprescription lotions are available for treating skin inflammations caused by poison ivy. Apply lotion frequently to relieve itching and to soothe and dry irritated area. See your doctor for treatment if irritation is not cleared up in 3 to 4 days.

### Control

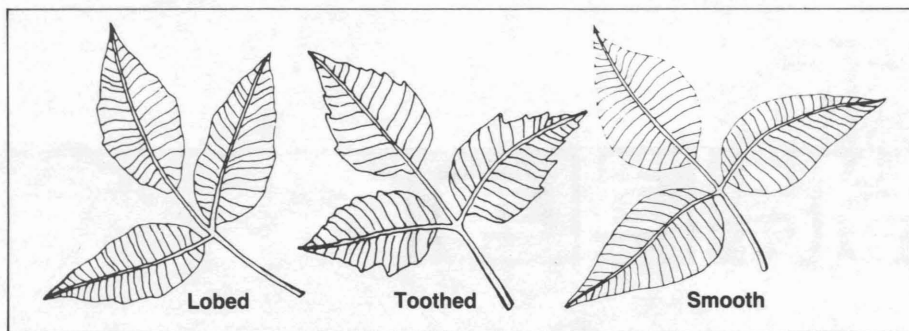
Poison ivy plants can be controlled by manual chopping, but a herbicide applied as a spray solution is more effective. The most effective herbicides are ammonium sulfamate (AMS, Ammate® X, Ammate® X-NI), 3-amino-s-triazole (amitrole); 2,4,5-T, silvex and 2,4-D. All these herbicides are absorbed through leaves and stems.

Spring, summer and early fall applications after the leaves are fully developed and growing vigorously are most effective. Apply herbicides only when there is no danger of wind blowing the fine spray particles onto other plants. Use herbicides carefully and apply as directed on the container label.

Ammonium sulfamate and amitrole are the most effective of the herbicides listed above, but ammonium sulfamate, in the form of yellow crystals that dissolve readily in water, may be the safest because of its reaction on desirable plants.

Ammonium sulfamate, used with care at recommended rates, controls all poison ivy without endangering other plants or soil; although, a large amount applied to soil surface can cause soil sterilization. Nontoxic to animals and humans, ammonium sulfamate can be used throughout the growing season to treat poison ivy.

Mix 1 pound of ammonium sulfamate in 1 gallon of water with 2 tablespoons of a wetting agent for spraying the foliage of sprouts and seedlings of poison ivy. A knapsack hand sprayer is satisfactory. Wet foliage



thoroughly. Although poison ivy treated with ammonium sulfamate solution will begin to turn brown within 24 hours after spraying, the plants will not die for several weeks. Usually, two or more treatments at 6- to 8-week intervals control all regrowth and kill all poison ivy plants. Remove standing dead stems from the soil and destroy them.

Amitrole is used as a foliage and stem wetting spray. Follow instructions on container label for rate of herbicide. Use a knapsack or similar pressure sprayer producing medium sized droplets. Avoid spraying desirable plants to prevent injury. Spray when wind speed is low to avoid drift.

To control large poison ivy plants growing or climbing on shade trees, cut the stem near the ground and cover the freshly cut surface with ammonium sulfamate crystals. Remove the tops of old stems from the tree and destroy them.

Control poison oak infestation on rangeland after brush clearing by applying 2 pounds per acre of silvex or 2,4,5-T as ground or air broadcast. A second treatment the next year is necessary to control seedlings.

### Precautions

When herbicides are used to control poison ivy, apply them carefully, following the directions on the container label. Also consider the following:

- Ammonium sulfamate is corrosive to metal and wire fences.
- Thoroughly wash metal containers after spraying.
- Ammonium sulfamate kills grass on contact but is safe to use near shrubbery if the solution is not sprayed on the foliage. Heavy applications of herbicides such as ammonium sulfamate will kill lawn grasses and weeds and can cause temporary soil sterilization. Properly used herbicides help agriculturists and homeowners control unwanted vegetation.

- Keep ammonium sulfamate in an airtight, non-corrosive container.
- Ammonium sulfamate should be washed from skin with soap and water. Also, after treating poison ivy, wash clothing separately.
- When treating poison ivy plants, which are growing in shade trees, do not break the trees' bark.

Suggestions for using herbicides are based on:

- Effectiveness under Texas conditions
- Avoidance of residues in excess of allowable tolerances
- Avoidance of toxicity to desirable vegetation, animals and humans
- Avoidance of other adverse side effects on non-target organisms

Suggested herbicides must be registered and labeled for use by the Environmental Protection Agency. *Because the status of herbicide label clearances is subject to change, always be certain a herbicide is currently labeled for the intended use.*

The user is *always responsible* for the effects of herbicide residues on his livestock and crops, as well as for problems that could arise from drift of the herbicide to property of others. *Always carefully read and follow instructions on the container label.*

For further information, contact your county Extension agent, area range specialist or state range brush and weed control specialist at Texas A&M University (713) 845-2754, or project leader in pesticide chemicals and agricultural chemist at Texas A&M University (713) 845-6021.

### Reference

FB-1972, United States Department of Agriculture, *Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac, Identification, Precautions and Eradication*

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The original version of this publication was prepared by Carlyn O. Hoffman, former Extension range brush and weed control specialist, The Texas A&M University System.

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