

Poison Ivy Control

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Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) is found in nearly every part of Michigan. It is known by several different names, such as three-leaved ivy, poison creeper, climbing sumac and poison oak. Although it can grow as a self-supporting, erect woody shrub, its usual growth habit is as a slender vine running along the ground, or growing on shrubs and trees. The vines can grow to several inches in diameter over a period of years.

Poison ivy has three leaflets occurring alternately along the stem. Leaflets are usually smooth, but may be either a dull or glossy green. Leaf margins (edges) can be smooth, toothed, and/or lobed. Leaves on the same vine often have a number of color and leaf margin combinations. It is possible, however, that all leaves on a vine will have the same general character. Because there are no distinguishing characteristics to warn an unsuspecting individual that a vine is poison ivy, the old saying of "leaflets three, let it be" should be remembered.

The flowers of poison ivy are typically inconspicuous and arise in clusters above the leaves. The berrylike fruit has a smooth waxy appearance and

is gray to white in color. After the leaves drop in the fall, the berries are a distinct identifier of the poison ivy plant. As a vine climbs shrubs and trees, it produces numerous "aerial roots" which attach to the tree or shrub. The "aerial roots" give the vine a characteristic appearance often described as looking like a "fuzzy rope."

Poison ivy is often found in fence rows, railroad embankments, roadsides, transmission lines, in parks, nature preserves and many other wooded areas. Always be on the lookout for this plant in these areas regardless of the season.

Poison ivy plants produce an oil called urushiol, which is

usually capable of causing severe skin irritations the year around. There is always the potential of transferring some of the oil present in the leaves, stems, fruit, roots or flowers of the poison ivy plant to the skin. Although contact with the plant is normally the method of exposure, an individual can also be exposed by handling clothing, tools, objects or animals which have become contaminated with the oil or by smoke from burning the plants.

Symptoms of Poisoning

The symptoms associated with poisoning usually appear

Poison ivy as it appears in the summer months.



within 12 to 24 hours, but may appear in as little as 3 or 4 hours or be delayed for several days. The time span is dependent upon an individual's sensitivity, the amount of oil that contacted the skin, and the season. Spring and summer are the times of greatest potential for problems. Damaged leaves exude the oil, which is easily transferred to skin, clothes and objects. Symptoms are itchiness, skin inflammation, swelling and the formation of blisters. For severe cases of poison ivy, a doctor may prescribe a cortisone skin cream or other medication to help reduce swelling and itching. For less severe cases, soak the affected area in solutions of potassium permanganate, baking soda, Epsom salts or very hot water to provide some relief. Over the counter skin creams with cortisone are also available in most stores. Bathing the contaminated area with a strong, alkaline, non-oily soap, immediately after contact, may reduce the severity of the skin reaction.

Control Measures

Two general methods of control of poison ivy are cultural and chemical. Cultural methods should not be attempted unless the individual is tolerant to poison ivy. Individual sensitivity to poison ivy varies greatly. Natural immunity is originally present in all persons, but is lost after the first contact with the oil. Subsequent contact with the oil will result in skin irritation, although severity of the reaction may

vary. Therefore, always take care when attempting to eradicate this plant. Individuals must also be careful when using chemical methods so that desirable plants are not mistakenly killed or injured. **ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANY HERBICIDE USED AROUND THE HOME.**

Cultural

Burning is not a recommended method for eradication. Burning produces soot particles which carry the oil into the air. Individuals coming in contact with the smoke will experience severe cases of poisoning.

Poison ivy can usually be dug out when the soil is wet and there are only a few plants. However, attempts to remove roots from dry soil are futile. Pieces of root remaining in the soil may sprout and replace the original plants. Plowing is also of little value, since the disturbed root systems will sprout. Repeated cutting of the plant back to the ground surface will eventually starve the root system and the plant will die. However, repeated cutting increases the chances of exposure to the toxic oil.

Herbicides

Several herbicides are effective in the control of poison ivy. Most of the products listed in this bulletin can be found in premixed or easily used formulations at local home and garden centers. Other chemical products will control this plant, but may not be registered for use around the home and are

designated as Restricted Use Products (RUP). If these chemicals are required, contact your local county Extension office for procedures on becoming a certified applicator and for the location of a local commercial pesticide distributor for product availability.

There are numerous company and store brand names for the herbicides which control poison ivy. The different brand names will use one or more of the chemicals described in this publication. The major difference among the brands will be the amount of the active ingredient found in the product. The label on each product will list the name of the active ingredient and its concentration. If the chemical will control poison ivy, it will be stated on the label. Always read the label to confirm that any chemical you buy will control your specific pest. The label should list poison ivy and give the proper rate to be applied, along with other details on proper application procedure.

Several commonly used herbicides that control poison ivy are:

Glyphosate

This product is sold under the trade names of *Roundup* and *Kleenup*. It is applied to the foliage of poison ivy, but is translocated throughout the plant, including the roots. Glyphosate has no soil activity. It will kill or injure all plants contacted by the spray, including grasses. Apply near the foliage and green bark of

desirable ornamentals with extreme caution. Do not apply Glyphosate when rain is expected within six hours of application because its effectiveness will be reduced. After treatment, do not disturb the vegetation for at least 1 week. **Remember**, dead poison ivy still contains toxic oil. Handle it with care. When Glyphosate is the active ingredient listed on the label, it is identified as **Isopropylamine salt of glyphosate**.

Amitrole

Amitrole is sold under the trade names of *Amitrol-T* (RUP), and *Amizol* (RUP), among others. It is applied to the foliage and is translocated throughout the plant. It is nonselective, therefore it will kill or injure any plant to which it is applied. It also remains active in the soil for several weeks after application, so it is important not to use it near other desirable plants. The soil activity also prevents the planting of new vegetation for at least 4 weeks. Do not use it in areas where food crops will be raised or animals grazed. When amitrole is the active ingredient listed on the label, it is identified as **3-Amino-1,2,4-triazole**.

2,4-D

This product is sold under many tradenames and is often mixed with 2,4-DP to improve its effectiveness on woody plants. It is not the most effective treatment for controlling poison ivy, but it does not kill grass. Repeated treatments are usually required

because the chemical seldom kills the entire root system.

Ester formulations of 2,4-D are more effective than amine formulations because they more easily penetrate the plant tissue. However, ester formulations are also more susceptible to volatilization and drift and so require more care to insure that other desirable plants are not damaged. Amine formulations are therefore recommended for use around the home. Do not apply 2,4-D if rainfall is expected within six to eight hours. When 2,4-D or 2,4-DP are the active ingredients listed on the label, they are identified as **2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and 2,4-Dichlorophenoxypropionic acid (2,4-DP)**.

Some plants are extremely sensitive to very small amounts of 2,4-D and 2,4-DP. Many plants can be affected by the trace amounts of these chemicals remaining in spray equipment after cleaning. It is recommended that a separate sprayer be used for 2,4-D and 2,4-DP applications. If the sprayer must be used for other purposes, rinse it at least twice with household ammonia, at a rate of 8 teaspoons per gallon or 1% by volume. Follow the ammonia rinses with three rinses of clean water. All rinses should include spraying the solutions through the entire spray system, including the nozzle(s).

Triclopyr

This product is sold under the trade names of *Garlon*, *Brush-B-Gon* and others. It controls

many annual and perennial broadleaf weeds, including poison ivy. The best results occur when the application is made on the foliage of actively growing vegetation. Protect desirable ornamental shrubs, trees, and crops such as grapes, vegetables, and flowers from any spray mist. Use a coarse spray to minimize drift. Do not plant trees in treated areas for a period of at least six months. Grasses are not affected by this chemical. **Triclopyr** is listed on the label as the active ingredient.

Summary

Other chemical products may also be used to control poison ivy. Although they may not be registered for residential use, they are available for use in other situations, such as along fence rows, in fields, or in wooded areas. These products include dicamba (Banvel), hexazinone (Velpar), 2,4-D ester + 2,4-DP ester, picloram (Tordon), and sulfometuron methyl (Oust). For specific recommendations on the use of these chemicals, contact your local county Extension office.

