

INJURIOUS PLANTS

Poison Ivy



Poison Sumac



Poison Oak



Plants that cause injuries range from microscopic in size to huge trees. They include some of the grasses, shrubs, and vines. In some species, the whole plant is poisonous and, in others, one or more of the parts can be injurious. These parts include: limbs (stems), flowers, fruits, berries, leaves, bark, roots, seeds, bulbs, and pods. In poison ivy and poison oak, the whole plant is poison, especially the leaves and roots. Certain tobacco plants have only poisonous seeds. In certain lilies, only the tuber is injurious. In yellow jasmine, the flower is alkaloid, while in tomatoes and potatoes, the leaves are poison and the roots or fruits are nutritious and edible. More plant injuries are caused by poison ivy, poison sumac, and poison oak than all other varieties of plants combined.

Distribution: U.S. Army Training Support Center (TSC)
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SYMPTOMS

Contact poisoning may result in a variety of symptoms depending upon the amount of exposure to the plant, the presence or absence of allergic sensitivity, and the location of body part exposed.

1. Redness and swelling of involved skin.
2. Headache.
3. Burning sensation on involved parts of the body.
4. Skin eruptions (rash).
5. Skin itching.

NOTE: *THE RASH MAY APPEAR FROM WITHIN SEVERAL HOURS TO AS MANY AS 72 HOURS AFTER EXPOSURE.*

6. Blisters on the involved skin. The blisters break after 2 to 4 days and leave a raw surface which becomes encrusted. They will usually heal within three weeks.
7. When ingested (swallowed), usually there is only a burning sensation in the throat. Sometimes inflammation of the stomach occurs with vomiting and diarrhea.

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PREVENTION

Creams, lotions, or sprays are not recommended as protection against the allergen that causes plant dermatitis. The only effective prophylaxis is to avoid contact with the plant carrying the allergen.

Most injuries by poisonous plants can be prevented by taking precautions and making observations in the area.

1. Inquire about poisonous and other dangerous plants in the area.
2. Obtain information on poisonous plants in the environment from the preventive medicine representative.
3. Wear clothes and foot protection at all times.
4. Avoid touching unfamiliar plants or allowing them to touch you.
5. Avoid touching the face or genitals with unwashed hands.
6. Don't chew on any part of an unfamiliar plant. Don't use unfamiliar plants for fuel or cooking materials.
7. Stand upwind of burning brush which contains poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac.

Warning: *Don't inhale the smoke or allow the smoke to touch your skin.*

8. Check places where poisonous plants usually grow.
 - a. Almost every state in the U.S.
 - b. Vines, creeping on the ground.
 - c. Vines, climbing around trees.
 - d. Vines mixed with bushes and weeds.
 - e. Vines along fences and eaves.

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FIRST-AID

1. Treatment of a serious plant injury should be provided by a physician in a hospital; therefore, arrange transportation to an appropriate treatment facility.
2. There are several things to do PRIOR TO or DURING transportation—

NOTE: *DO NOT DELAY EVACUATION.*

- a. **CALM AND REASSURE THE VICTIM.** Reduce movement to reduce the spread of the allergen or toxic substance.
- b. Thoroughly wash the exposed area(s) of the patient's skin with soap and water or with alcohol to remove or reduce the amount of irritant on the skin.
- c. Confine the washing to the affected area to avoid spreading the poison to other parts of the body.
- d. Wash the area several times in succession—use a fresh solution for each wash.
- e. Do not dress the affected area, as this will cause retention of moisture and will not allow the contaminated area to dry.
- f. Avoid contact with the contaminated water in the event you are allergic to the source.
- g. Contaminated clothing should be laundered before reuse.
- h. Thoroughly wash your hands and any part of your body which may have come in contact with the irritant; also, remove all of your clothing exposed to irritant. This will help in preventing your contracting the poison following the administration of treatment to the patient.
- i. Record the treatment given.
- j. Evacuate the patient, if necessary. Depending on the severity of the contamination, limited duty or evacuation to an MTF may be necessary.