

Weed Identification and Control Sheet:

Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)

DESCRIPTION:

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 which are often serrated. Usually these leaflets have one dominant lobe, giving the outer two leaves the appearance of mittens with the central leaf resembling a mitten with two thumbs. Young leaves are often dark green or maroonish, and the attractive fall foliage can range from brick to fire-engine red.

Poison ivy is generally not considered a threat to native plant communities, in fact, the white berries provide winter food for birds and deer relish the foliage. Though harmless to most animals, many humans are allergic to the urushiol (yoo-roo-shee-ol) oil produced by the plant which results in itching, inflammation and blisters. This oil is found in all parts of the plant during all times of the year. This oil can also be spread by contact with clothing, shoes, pets or equipment that have touched poison ivy weeks or months after initial contact. It can even be transmitted in the air when poison ivy is burned, which presents a severe risk if inhaled and has been known to result in hospitalization and death. Though some people are not allergic to the oil, it's important to wear pants, long sleeves and gloves when working around poison ivy since the allergy can develop after repeated exposures to urushiol. If your unprotected skin does come in contact with poison ivy wash the effected area immediately.



-3
Aggressive
Weed

CONTROL METHODS:

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

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.

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



SIMILAR LOOKING PLANTS:

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) is a similar looking vine which has five leaflets and uses climbing discs to attach to surfaces.

Wild grape (*Vitis riparia*) is another common vine that lives in similar habitats and climbs by aerial roots, though the leaves are very different, the vine is sometimes confused with poison ivy in the winter. Wild grape has flaky fibrous bark; poison ivy does not, but the mass of roots can make it appear very hairy. Black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*) leaves also look fairly similar, but this plant has thorns, flowers and berries. Seedlings of box elder (*Acer negundo*), a weedy tree of waste areas, are often confused with poison ivy.