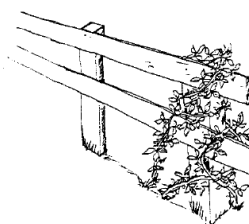


Poison Ivy: Identification and Control

Description

Poison ivy (*Rhus radicans* L.) is a climbing plant belonging to the sumac family, which is extremely variable in both its habitat and growth. It grows on sandy, stony or rocky shores, in thickets, in clearings and along the borders of woods. This glossy leaved perennial can spread by seed or by producing shoots from its extensive underground roots. The plant stems are woody and can be found growing in two forms, as shown in the diagram to the right. The most frequent form is a trailing vine, with upright leafy stalks 10 to 80 cm high. The second kind is an aerial vine that may climb 6 to 10 m high on trees, posts or rough surfaces.



Aerial Vine

Trailing Vine



Types of Leaves

Source: Effective control of poison-ivy, Pest Management Regulatory Agency, April 1999 (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/pest/_notes/poisonivy-herbepuce/index-eng.php)



The poison ivy leaf consists of three pointed leaflets, with the middle leaflet having a much longer stalk than the two side ones. The leaflet itself can be extremely variable in shape, from smooth to toothed edges (examples shown above) and varies greatly in size, from 8 to 55 mm in length. Leaves are reddish when they emerge in the spring, turn green during the summer and become various shades of yellow, orange or red in the autumn.

The plant produces clusters of cream to yellow-green inconspicuous flowers during the months of June and July. Appearing in September, the berries are clustered, waxy and green to yellow in colour. The berry ranges in size from 3 to 7 mm in diameter. Berries often remain on the low, leafless stems of the plant all winter.

The sap of the plant contains an oily resin that causes an irritating inflammation of the skin on most people. All parts of the plant contain this resin in the sap. Most people develop symptoms 24 to 48 hours after contact. The extent of a reaction depends on the individual's sensitivity and the amount of resin in contact with the skin.

Control of Poison Ivy

Poison ivy can be difficult to control as it is a perennial plant that can grow from seed and underground roots. **Note: When working with or near poison ivy, always wear protective clothing to ensure that no area of the skin is exposed to the sap of the adult plant. Contact with any part of the plant may cause a reaction in some individuals. The sap may stick to clothing, boots, tools and animals so the oil can be transferred to other people through all these items.**

Cultivation

Repeated cultivation will eventually eliminate poison ivy as the plant does not regenerate easily from plant fragments. For effective poison ivy control, the reproductive capacity of the plant can be disrupted by destroying its roots and stems. The ability of the plant to reproduce should be limited by digging out and hand picking the roots and stems, and working the soil frequently. It is also important to eliminate any source of seed. Since loose seeds may be difficult to detect, remove any dead plant material from the ground in case some seeds are still attached to the stems.

Disposal

Dead poison ivy plants can still cause dermatitis and must be handled with care. Dispose of them by placing them in a garbage bag. Make sure the bags containing poison ivy are well marked and disposed of with the household garbage. Another method is to bury the remains deep into the ground. Sufficient depth is important to ensure there is no regrowth. Do not burn poison ivy as this may release the resin in the form of tiny droplets carried by the ash and dust particles in the smoke. A severe reaction may occur if a sensitive person is exposed to or inhales the smoke.

Herbicide Control

Applying herbicides to control poison ivy can be effective. Herbicides should be applied when the plant is actively growing (June 15 to July 31). One single treatment may be sufficient but it is possible for regrowth to occur. It may be necessary to apply repeated treatments as regrowth occurs. Applying herbicides by spot-treatment will help to minimize the chances of the product drifting onto desirable vegetation. Herbicide spot-treatment is also advisable when poison ivy is present as a lawn weed.

Several chemicals have been shown to be effective for the control of poison ivy. The chemical treatment of poison ivy must take into account the location in which the weed is growing, with special care taken if the weed is growing near desirable plants. Domestic class products available to homeowners for the control of poison ivy will usually contain one, or will consist of a mixture, of the following active ingredients: amitrole, glyphosate, 2,4-D, mecoprop or dicamba. Domestic pesticides can usually be purchased through garden centres or hardware stores. Purchase only those products whose labels indicate poison ivy control.

These products may also kill desirable plants, so great care is needed in their use. Detailed directions for each herbicides use can be found on the product label. It is important to ensure that the manufacturer's directions are followed during herbicide application.

