

Diggin' In #Gardening#

Fall can be poison ivy time, so watch what you touch

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The first day of autumn brings leaf peeping, apple picking, pumpkin carving and brisk walks. For most Americans, it also means fall yard pickup ? and along with it, an increased exposure to poison ivy. According to a report published in *Weed Science*, research indicates that poison ivy has grown much more aggressive since the 1950s, with leaf size and oil content measurably increased. This is bad news if you are one of the more than 350,000 people who are stricken by poison ivy annually. Poison ivy tops the list of plants to avoid because it contains urushiol, an oily resin that binds to the skin on contact and may result in a hypersensitivity reaction characterized by itching, burning skin eruptions. This rash-causing poison ivy sap is a clear liquid found in the plant's leaves and the roots, which many people develop an allergy to over time. **POISON IVY IN FALL, PICTURED LEFT** Urushiol oil remains active for several years, so handling dead leaves or vines can cause a reaction. In addition, oil transferred from the plant to other objects such as gardening tools, an article of clothing -- or even a pet -- can cause the rash when it comes in contact with human skin. If poison ivy is eaten, the mucus lining of the mouth and digestive tract can be damaged. And if poison ivy is burned and the smoke inhaled, a rash may appear in the lining of the lungs, causing extreme pain and respiratory difficulty that may become life-threatening. How to know it For decades parents have taught their children the sing-song phrase "leaves of three, let it be" as a way of learning to spot this pretty but toxic plant. Poison ivy also has inconspicuous greenish flowers with five petals, and berry-like fruits that are hard and whitish. There are two types of poison ivy, the climbing variety, *Toxicodendron radicans*, and the non-climbing, *Toxicodendron rydbergii* (from the Latin *toxicum*, "poison," and the Greek *dendron*, "tree"). Because the varieties interbreed, they look similar and sometimes grow in the same places. They also create the same allergic rash, which may last anywhere from a week to three weeks. . Although some people are immune to poison ivy, most people develop a rash after coming in contact with the plant. After the oil has touched the skin it takes about 12 to 36 hours for redness and swelling to appear, followed by blisters and itching. Contrary to popular belief, scratching or oozing blister fluid cannot spread the outbreak or transfer it to other people. New lesions that appear a few days after a breakout of primary lesions means that there was less oil

deposited on that area of the skin, or that the skin was less sensitive to it. How to win the battle against it Poison ivy's urushiol oil is extremely potent, and only one nanogram (billionth of a gram) is needed to cause a rash. Even if you've never broken out you cannot assume you are immune as the more often you are exposed to urushiol, the more likely it is that you will break out with an allergic rash. In fact, upwards of 90% of the population develops an allergy to it. You and your family can have a more enjoyable fall by following these tips for avoiding outbreaks of poison ivy, along with these helpful treatments for soothing and healing rashes if you do succumb. How to prevent it ? Avoiding contact with the plant is, of course, the best prevention. Go on an expedition, wearing long pants, a shirt with long sleeves, boots, and gloves to minimize exposure. Tour your yard, the playground, the route your children walk to school, a campsite you're visiting, and any other outdoor areas you frequent. When you spot poison ivy, show it to your kids and instruct them to stay away from it. If you have a large amount growing in your yard, consult with a professional landscaper for removal. (Unless you are a professional, do not "weed whack" as it sprays the poison ivy and hence the oil right at you.) ? Urushiol oil is extremely stable and will stay potent for years--which means you can get a rash from clothing or tools that got oil on them many seasons ago. After exposure to poison ivy, put on gloves and wipe everything you had with you and on you with rubbing alcohol and water, including shoes, tools, and clothing. Then wash clothes at least twice before wearing (if possible using bleach), hose off garden tools well, and apply leather moisturizer on footwear to prevent them from drying out (again, put on gloves). ? Pets seem to be immune from getting poison ivy, but many people do get a rash from the residual urushiol oil on their fur. Therefore it's a good idea to bath our dog or cat wearing thick rubber gloves (not latex). After washing the pet, wash yourself using cold water to keep pores closed. Consult with your veterinarian if you have any questions. How to treat it ? Urushiol binds to skin proteins and begins to penetrate within 15 minutes of contact. If treated before that time, a reaction may be prevented. First, wash exposed site with cold water (hot water will open your pores, allowing the oil in). Follow this by bathing it in milk, which helps to get between oil and skin. Dry off well and then apply Topricin, which will help neutralize the effect of any remaining urushiol oil left on your skin. ? Wherever poison ivy grows, there is usually a plant known as jewelweed growing close by?especially in moister, shadier areas. Herbalists and Native Americans have used jewelweed for centuries to treat and speed the healing of poison ivy as it seems to be a natural remedy. When you are in the field and may have been exposed to poison ivy, pick jewelweed, slice the stem, and rub its juice on your skin to ease irritation and help prevent a breakout. ? Some companies and herbalists offer poison ivy treatment soaps that contain jewelweed and other soothing natural ingredients, such as pine tar. Soaps are available from Poison Ivy Soap Company, Burt's Bees, or search online for sources. ? Take homeopathic Rhus Tox 30X tablets to help build immunity to poison ivy. ? For severe outbreaks, or if you have any concerns whatsoever, see your doctor right away. Learn more www.poison-ivy.org/quiz/index.htm www.topricin.com

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