

Poison Ivy

What is Poison Ivy?

Poison Ivy is the name commonly applied to several species of the cashew or sumac family of plants.

These plants, which are native to the temperate regions of North America, all produce *urushiol* within the resin ducts of their leaves, bark, flowers, and fruits.

Urushiol causes an allergic contact dermatitis of the skin, resulting in an itching rash.

Some people are more sensitive to urushiol than others; a few are completely immune to its effects.

Poison ivy dermatitis can be caused by:

- Skin contact with any part of the plant.
- Exposure to smoke from burning plants.
- Contact with objects (including animals or clothing) that have touched the plant.

Preventive Measures

- Plant extracts
- Barrier creams
- Protective clothing

An old wives' tale says that eating the leaves will provide protection. This is *not true*; in fact, people who have eaten them have died.

The best prevention is *avoidance*.

- Learn to recognize the plants and avoid them.
- Use care not to contact the plants.
- Use barrier creams or plant extracts, with protective clothing.
- Wear gauntlet gloves.
- Tuck long shirt sleeves into the gauntlets.
- Raise shirt collars.
- Blouse long pants over boots.

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Diagnosis and First Aid

The dermatitis usually appears from one to three days after contact with the resin. The affected area becomes red, swollen and itchy. Later, small blisters appear and may unite to form larger ones. The rash usually lasts one week, but can last up to three weeks.

Immediately after contact:

- Remove contaminated clothing and jewelry.
- Wash the area with soap and warm water, but don't irritate the skin.
- Liberally apply rubbing alcohol or 5% ferric chloride in alcohol solution.
- In mild cases, apply a lotion for this purpose, to ease discomfort.
- If a severe reaction persists, seek medical help.

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant.

Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at <http://www.thehartford.com/corporate/losscontrol/>

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