

# WELLNESS WORKS



April showers bring May flowers ... and poison ivy. Yikes! It's springtime, so it's time for you to get outside and enjoy the sunshine. Whether you are gardening, hiking, or taking your pet for a walk we all have to be wary of that pesky poison ivy. So before you head out, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with some of the plants that could cause trouble.

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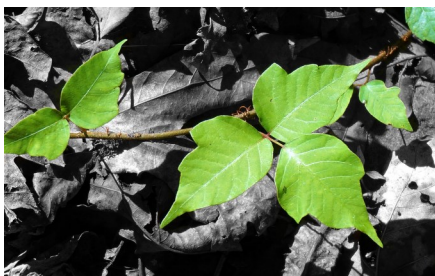
## What is Poison Ivy?

Poison ivy, and other variations like poison oak and poison sumac, are all from the Anacardiaceae family also known as the sumac or cashew family. Unlike cashew plants though, poison ivy contains Urushiol oil, pronounced "yoo-ROO-she-ol", that is released when the plant is bruised (read touched!). This oil is actually in the entire plant, including the stem, roots, and berries not just the leaves with over 80% of the population being allergic. That being said, the contact dermatitis caused by the Urushiol oil in the plants is one of the most common allergic reactions in the US and can cause anything from itching to severe rashes and blistering. The oil can stay active on objects such as pets, clothing, gardening tools, and camping gear for up to **5 years**.

## Spot that Plant!

Identifying these plants can be a little tricky because there are many varieties, but as the saying goes, "Leaves of three, let it be!" This is a very true statement, as all poison ivy plants have groups of three leaves — ALWAYS. This is not to say that there aren't perfectly safe plants that also have groups of three leaves, but it is better to err on the side of caution when dealing with poison ivy.

Poison ivy grows primarily in temperate climates in the Americas and Asia. Depending on the time of year, the location, and the plant type the plants can look slightly different. Here are some tips for spotting poison ivy:



Example of Poison Ivy Leaflets

### LEAVES:

- Leaves contain 3 almond shaped leaflets (Fun fact: though leaflets appear to be individual leaves, they do not technically branch from the stem so are given the term leaflet)
- The center leaflet is usually longer and slightly bigger than the other two in the cluster.
- Contrary to popular belief the leaflets can be either glossy or dull
- The edges can be either smooth or jagged
- Young leaves can be reddish or light green, while mature plants are usually dark green

### VINE:

- Poison Ivy: usually grows as ground cover, but can also be a long hairy vine on trees
- Poison Oak: has furry stems and grows on the ground
- Poison Sumac: can grow 5 -20 ft tall and can look like a shrub or small tree. Flourishes in very wet areas like swamps and marches



Hairy Poison Ivy Vine

### BERRIES (Drupes)

- Poison Ivy: berries are smooth and whiteish green
- Poison Oak: berries are furry or velvety and more brown than poison ivy berries
- Poison Sumac: green flattened shaped berries in summer, white berries in the fall

To learn more, [click here](#) to see the specific types of plants in your region and pictures of what they look like.



## Prevention is the Best Medicine!

**Avoid.** Educate yourself on what poison ivy looks like, where it is most likely to grow, and avoid any sort of contact with the leaves, roots, and stems!

**Wash.** Even if you did your best to avoid the ivy, thoroughly wash your body with soap and water as soon as possible after outdoor activities like hiking in the woods or gardening. This can mitigate the risk of the oils seeping into your skin and causing a reaction.

**Wear Clothing.** If you are likely to be in close proximity of poison ivy, cover exposed skin with long pants, long sleeve shirts, boots, and gloves. Be sure to properly wash these articles of clothing since the oil can stay active on them for up to 5 years.

**Remove the Plants.** Decrease your risk of coming into contact with the ivy by getting rid of any plants in your yard. This can be done with an herbicide or by pulling up the roots of the plants. If you decide to pull up the plants be sure to wear gloves and wash your hands anything else that may have come into contact afterwards. **DO NOT** burn the plants! If inhaled, the smoke of the urushiol can cause a rash inside the lungs leading to respiratory issues and in extreme cases death.

**Bathe your Pets.** Although your cats and dogs will not have an allergic reaction to poison ivy (Lucky them!), their fur can carry the oil and rub off on you! Before you snuggle up or play with your animals, give them a nice bath if you think they may have been exposed to the ivy.

**Barrier Lotion.** There are plenty of over-the-counter skin lotions or creams aimed at preventing the poison ivy oil from absorbing into your skin even with contact. If you know you are going to be touching poison ivy, consider using a cream.

## Myth or Truth?

*You have to come into direct contact with a plant to get a reaction.*

### Myth.

It is possible to get a reaction from touching other objects that have to oil on them. Contaminated pet fur or clothing are common examples of this.

*Poison ivy is contagious and can be spread by touching an infected person's rash or blisters.*

### Myth, neither are contagious.

Even though the oozing blisters may look scary, the only way to contract the contact dermatitis is by touching the oil of the plant.

*Barrier creams can help to prevent a poison ivy rash.*

### Truth, well mostly true.

As long as you carefully follow the application instructions, some barrier creams have been proven to be effective in preventing a poison ivy reaction even with direct contact.

*The more you come in contact with the plant, the less sensitive you can become.*

### Myth.

It is actually much more likely to become more sensitive to poison ivy the more you come in contact.

## Treatment

Most poison ivy treatment is limited to relieving symptoms with the rash usually clearing

up on its own in 2 to 3 weeks. In more extreme cases, such as a widespread rash or many blisters, your doctor may prescribe an oral corticosteroid.

Here are some tips for getting through a case of poison ivy:

- Do not scratch. As itchy as it may get, try your best not to scratch. It can lead to infection and or future scarring.
- Apply calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream to soothe the itching. There are many over the counter options available. If you need help, your local pharmacist should be able to assist.
- Oatmeal is not just for eating! Some people claim that oatmeal baths can provide relief since oatmeal has antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties.



- Oral antihistamines can sometimes lessen the allergic reaction. Always consult with your doctor before taking any medication.
- Wet a washcloth with cold water and place on the skin for 15 mins. This can help to reduce itchiness and reduce inflammation.

## Smoothie Class is in Session!

This month we are sharing some basic guidelines to make your own delicious and healthy smoothies at home. We have broken smoothies into 3 categories, frozen fruit, fresh fruit, and veggie smoothies and have included ratios to concoct the perfect smoothie.

### Frozen Fruit Smoothies:

- 2 parts frozen fruit
- 2 parts liquid
- 1 T other

### Fresh Fruit Smoothies:

- 2 parts fresh fruit
- 1 part liquid
- 3 ice cubes
- 1 T other

### Veggie Smoothies:

- 3 parts frozen fruit
- 2 parts veggies
- 2 parts liquid
- 1 T other

### Tips:

When your bananas start to get a little past their prime, try slicing them up and freezing them. Bananas are a great base for making creamy smoothie

Some liquids that are good for smoothie making are water, milk, plant milks like almond and coconut milk, coconut water, and fruit juices.

Adding a tablespoon of a superfood can give you a boost and most of the time you can't even taste it! Try a tablespoon of maca powder, spirulina, or chia seeds. A tablespoon of cacao powder can give you that chocolatey taste without the calories!

Some good smoothie veggies are baby spinach, kale, arugula, and beet greens.

### Yummy Veggie Fruit Combo Smoothie:

- 1 part frozen pineapple
- 1 part frozen mango
- 1 frozen banana
- 2 parts baby spinach
- 2 parts water
- 1 T chia seeds

## Get Out and Exercise

This is just your monthly reminder to get out and exercise! The Department of Health and Human Services recommends that most people should get at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week. That's less than 22 minutes a day!



If this seems like a lot, start small and work your way up. Whether it's 10 minutes, 30 minutes, or 2 hours, every bit counts and can go a long way towards maintaining or even improving your health.