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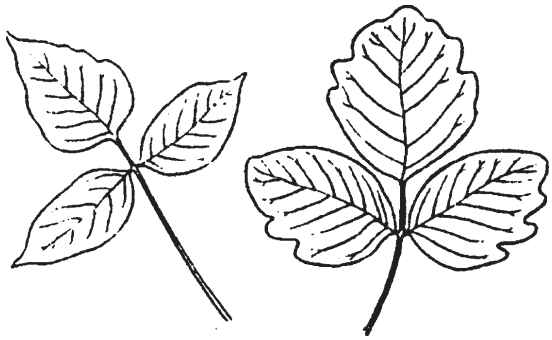
Poison Ivy and Poison Oak

Description of Poison Ivy:

Above, leaves and flower clusters on the new growth and clusters of berry-like fruits persisting on the growth of the preceding year.

Variation of poison ivy leaflets



Poison Ivy and Poison Oak differ mainly in the degree of lobing of the leaflets. Both are woody plants showing tremendous variation in growth pattern and leaf characteristics.

Growth may be either as an erect shrub, a vine climbing by aerial rootlets on fences, walls or trees, or the plant may lie prostrate on the ground.

Leaves are arranged alternately and are compounded with three leaflets. These three leaflets on a leafstalk are usually referred to as “leaves in groups of threes.” The leaves may have a dull or glossy surface or may even be somewhat hairy, especially on the lower surface. The edges of the leaves are either smooth, toothed or somewhat lobed. When a leaf is broken off, a crescent-shaped scar is left on the twig above which a light brown bud can be seen. The small greenish-white flowers appear in clusters in the axils of the leaves.

The clusters of small, round, waxy, white, berry-like fruits appear in late summer and often last all winter. Seeds germinate freely. Seedlings soon produce creeping stems or rootstocks from the lowest nodes.

Because of its great variation in appearance from place to place, a person who is familiar with poison ivy in one part of the country may not recognize it in another. Stay away from any suspicious plant, vine, bush or creeper until you have checked the leaf arrangement.

Under poor growth conditions, poison ivy may form small, spindly trailing branches that are well hidden in other vegetation. Look carefully for them.

Distinguishing Characteristics

The alternate leaves, each with three leaflets, will help you identify poison ivy and poison oak. In autumn and winter the clusters of white berry-like fruits make identification certain.

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Distribution and Habitat

Poison ivy is common throughout New York State, but is especially abundant in dry, rocky soil, in thickets along the edges of fields, woods, roads and paths. The climbing form is common in low, rich woodlands.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It employs a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce plant problems. These include using resistant plant varieties, proper plant selection and placement, good aftercare and biological and/or mechanical controls. As a last resort, after all other remedies have been explored, a pesticide* that is least toxic to people and natural predators, can be considered. Prior to using any pesticides, plants should always be monitored for the degree of infestation and a sensible control measure considered.

** A pesticide is a substance that kills, or attempts to kill, a particular pest, e.g.* ***insect****icide,* ***fung****icide,* ***herb****icide, etc.*

Management

Poison ivy cannot be easily controlled by digging as the vine has a rather extensive root system and handling this plant can be hazardous. Glyphosate (Roundup or Kleen-up) is an effective weed killer for poison ivy and poison oak control. It is a foliar-absorbed systemic herbicide that is rapidly inactivated in the soil, and effective in controlling most weeds and some brush species with the right doses and timing. Be careful as this is a non-selective herbicide which may kill any plant (including desirable species) that are contacted by the spray. Woody brush, poison ivy, poison oak and brambles are most sensitive in August or September, before frost. Once the plants die, don't burn them. The toxic material is volatile and can be carried in smoke and cause infection.

Information Source: 2003 New York State Pesticide Recommendations, Cornell University.