



Poison Ivy, Sumac, and Oak

What is poison ivy, sumac, or oak?

"Poisoning" from plants such as poison ivy, poison sumac, and poison oak is an allergic reaction that happens when your skin touches these plants. Contact with the oil in these plants causes most people to have a rash, blisters, and itching. This contact usually happens in the spring and summer.

Poison ivy and poison oak have three leaflets on each stem and grow as a vine or bush. Poison sumac has opposing rows of 7 to 13 leaflets on each stem, with one leaflet at the end of the stem. It grows as a shrub or tree usually in damp, cool, marshy places. The poisonous oil is in the sap of these plants and oozes from any cut or crushed part of the plant, including the roots, stems, and leaves.

How does the allergic reaction occur?

The allergic reaction happens after touching one of these plants. A reaction can also occur after contact with anything that carries the oil from the plants, including clothes, tools, animal fur, or ashes and smoke from burning plants.

What are the symptoms?

- itching, often intense, red blotches that may be raised or flat, or blisters, which may show up in rows
- fever, headache, swelling of your throat and eyes or overall swelling of the body
- general feeling of discomfort including stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea.

Usually the rash is first noticed 1 to 2 days after contact. How bad the rash will be depends on the thickness of your skin, how allergic you are to the plant, and how much contact you had with the plant's oil.

How is it treated?

- As soon as possible, wash all exposed skin with strong soap and water
- Remove your clothes and shoes. Wash your clothes in detergent and water.
- Soak some cloth in aluminum acetate solution (Burrow's solution) and put the cloth on the rash. Then put calamine lotion or ointment on your skin to reduce the redness, ease the itching, and help dry up the blisters. Soaking in a lukewarm bath with cornstarch (1/2 cup) or colloidal oatmeal added may help ease the itching.
- Cover any oozing blisters with a clean gauze bandage soaked in a baking soda and water solution. Putting a over the counter 1% hydrocortisone ointment or cream on the affected areas 2 to 3 times a day

How long will the effects last?

The rash usually takes 1 to 3 weeks to heal.

Once the oil is washed off the skin, the rash cannot be spread by scratching itchy skin or from oozing blisters. However, scratching may lead to infection of the open sores. Trim nails to prevent infections.



Poison Oak



Poison Ivy