

POISON OAK

(*Rhus diversiloba*)



Whatever You Do...

"Don't scratch!" As many of us know, **poison oak** (*Rhus diversiloba*) will only get worse. You will do well to heed this advice and consider the following information if you are among those of us unfortunate enough to possess an allergy to this plant.

Exposure to the active ingredient in poison oak, urushiol, results in an acute contact dermatitis (better known as a rash) within one to five days after exposure. The rash usually consists of red streaks or patches often associated with intense itching. Later blisters develop, eventually breaking down and resulting in oozing and crusting. Scratching should be avoided because it may introduce infection and cause scarring. Scratching does not spread the rash, as the blisters are filled with serum, not the active urushiol.

If exposure is suspected, immediate treatment consists of rinsing with cool or cold water, followed by more extensive washing using a strong soap, still with cool or cold water. (This prevents your pores from opening). Also, wash all involved articles of clothing (including shoes) and avoid contact with any animals that may have also been exposed. Giving exposed animals a bath is a good idea (good luck with the cat!).

Urushiol may remain active for months or more on clothes, shoes, etc.

Treatment for poison oak consists of cool salt water or astringent compresses to relieve the itching and promote drying. Many over-the-counter creams are available to provide some relief. If the condition becomes extensive or disabling, a physician's advice should be sought.

Although the best advice I can offer is that you learn to recognize the poison oak plant and avoid contact, many of us will continue to awaken to an incredible burning itch. Just remember....DON'T SCRATCH!!!

Jeff Thomas
Health Education Center Coordinator

The leaves of the poison oak plant are arranged in groups of three leaflets- one leaflet at the end of the stem and two more opposite each other about two inches back from the end leaflet. The leaflets vary in size depending on water supply and sunshine. Most are oblong in shape, with small indentures along the margin of each leaflet. They resemble the leaves of the oak tree. In the spring, the leaves are a brilliant green, turning to a deep red in the fall and winter. Often the leaves are quite shiny due to the oil that causes the rash. The plant produces small, greenish flowers, in small clusters, which droop when the waxy white fruit (berries) ripens.

Poison oak is found throughout California, western Oregon, and western Washington. It grows in the form of a bush (of varying size) or as a vine that clings to the bark of trees. You will find it in either sunny or shady locations. Watch for it!



WHAT...ME WORRY?

The Wall Street Journal recently stated that the cost of laughing has increased 6.5 percent this year due to price increases in rubber chickens, comedy act admissions, and MAD magazine.

The reknown Alfred E. Neuman of MAD magazine fame has given the world a useful message for many years with his familiar "What, me worry?"

Anxiety, worry, despair and hopelessness seems to permeate each of our lives at some time with varying degrees of intensity. Alfred E. helps to remind us that our perceptions color the way we see the world. Perhaps giving ourselves permission to be human and to seek happiness in our own way is his message.

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