



POISON OAK

Thousands of California workers seek medical treatment for poison oak dermatitis every year. While some individuals are less susceptible than others are, no one is completely immune. There are some simple things you can do to prevent or minimize the unpleasant often-disabling effects of poison oak exposure. Learn to recognize, avoid, and prevent exposure, and get rid of it when possible.

Recognize - The poison oak leaf looks like a miniature oak leaf, a triple leaf pattern leading off one stem with prominent veins and a shiny surface. In some regions the leaves remain green during the entire time they are on the stem. In other areas the leaves change to various colors with the changing seasons. After the leaves fall off, the bare wood is also dangerous and so are the roots. It can grow in the form of vines, trailing shrubs, or upright woody shrubs. It may flourish in the deep woods where soil moisture is plentiful or it may be found in very dry soil on the most exposed hillsides.

Avoid - Stay away from any vegetation that you suspect may be poison oak. Avoid contact with anything that touched it, whether animal, clothing or tools.

Prevent - Sometimes you have to enter or work in areas where there is poison oak. When this is necessary, certain precautions can be taken:

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants tied around the ankles, leather gloves with gauntlets and neckerchiefs.
- Several protective creams are available which form barriers to protect against the toxic oil found in all parts of the plant. There are also injections or tablets that provide protection for some people.
- When removing clothing, take shoes off first and leave them outside for decontamination by washing.
- Remove all clothing and wash it separately.
- Any object you touch after having been exposed to poison oak can act as a carrier to contaminate others.
- If you come in contact with poison oak, wash immediately or take a shower, not a bath, using strong soap or detergent.
- When dressing, put shoes on last so that any poisonous substance remaining on shoes does not contaminate the inside of trousers.
- For severe inflammation and itching, consult a physician.

No part of the plant should ever be eaten. It is a violent irritant and poisonous. It should never be destroyed

by burning. Inhalation of the smoke can be catastrophic. Destroy poison oak by using an approved vegetation spray to eradicate it.