



July 24, 2015

POISON IVY CONTROL

Tuxedo Park offers an excellent venue for the Saline County Fair for many reasons. One of them is the City of Crete park crew always does an excellent job preparing the park for the fair and with trees, the shade can be a reprieve from the heat. Large cottonwood trees in the lakebed area, beef wash rack and “Camper Row” offer refreshing shade when the afternoon heat hits. This year was a big reminder of how well poison ivy grew. Anyone who has suffered through the agony of a poison ivy rash learns pretty quickly to avoid the plants whenever possible as did some youth and adults at this year’s County Fair by the camping or RV areas. Learning how to identify the plant is the first step in controlling it. All parts of the plant are poisonous at all times of the year - including the roots – and even the dead leaves in winter.

The old saying is, "Leaves of three, let it be." This refers to the structure of a poison ivy leaf, which consists of three smaller leaflets. The leaves of poison ivy are red in early spring then they change to shiny green. They turn yellow, red or orange in the fall. Each leaf is made up of three leaflets more or less notched at the edges. Two of the leaflets form a pair on opposite sides of the leafstalk, while the third stands by itself at the tip of the leafstalk. Poison ivy is often confused with poison oak. Poison oak grows in the Pacific Northwest and nearby regions of Canada, and poison sumac, which grows in the Eastern United States.

Plants can grow as an upright woody shrub, a trailing shrub that grows along the ground, or as a woody vine. Vines climb trees quite high and develop a mass of aerial roots along the stem, resulting in the appearance of a "fuzzy rope" growing up the tree. Poison ivy produces white, berry-like fruits. Although toxic to humans, these plants are an important food source for wildlife. The fruits are eaten by flickers and other woodpeckers, catbirds, chickadees, quail, pheasants, and turkeys. Deer and rabbits also browse the twigs.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, about 85 percent of people have an allergic reaction to poison ivy. It may take several exposures to poison ivy to trigger an allergic reaction and each time you have a reaction it might be different - even in the same year! The oily toxin in poison ivy is transmitted when the plant is injured - a break or just a nibble from an insect. Because the sticky, oily toxin is easily transmitted, there are indirect ways to contact it, for instance, from the fur of the family pet, garden tools, garden gloves, clothing, golf balls or other objects that have come in contact with an injured plant. The oily toxin can remain active for several months to a year on objects. If you know you've been exposed to poison ivy, change clothing immediately and wash the exposed skin with soap and cool water. Care should be taken not to touch any part of the body, for even tiny amounts of the oil will cause irritation.

A visible reaction, redness and swelling may be apparent within 12 to 24 hours. If poisoning develops, the blisters and red, itching skin may be treated with dressings of calamine lotion, Epsom salts, or bicarbonate of soda. Scientists have developed a vaccine that can be injected or swallowed. But this is effective only if taken before exposure. Contact your family physician or pharmacist for recommendations.



Poison ivy can be effectively controlled by hand pulling, spot treatment of the leaves with a herbicide or by cutting woody plants down and painting a herbicide on the stump. Hand pulling is the best but you must use protective clothing. Remove each plant's entire root, because sections of roots left behind can resprout. Wear rubber, chemical resistant gloves, long sleeves, long pants, shoes and socks to avoid skin contact. When finished, wash clothing and gloves separate from any other family laundry and rinse the washing machine afterwards.

Spot treat individual plants with a selective, brush-killing herbicide containing triclopyr, such as Ortho's Brush-Be-Gon, or a non-selective herbicide like glyphosate (Roundup®) if damage to nearby plants is not a concern. The herbicide can be applied anytime during the growing season but is most effective in late summer to early fall. Use a sprayer to wet the foliage with herbicide, but avoid soaking the soil or allowing herbicide to drift or splash onto non-target plants. Repeat applications will usually be necessary. On a tree, woody shrubs or vines can be cut down and the stump painted with concentrated (undiluted) glyphosate, which will translocate into the roots and kill them. That way the tree is not injured by herbicide.

Once the plants have died, remove them but always use safety precautions when handling dead poison ivy. Even though the plants are dead, the toxins remain. Dispose of the plants completely, but don't add them to your compost pile or burn them. Inhaling the smoke can result in an internal rash. If you have contact with poison ivy, wash the area as soon as possible with cool water and soap. I will try my best to educate and help the City Park staff eliminate the problem on the cottonwood trees by the beef wash rack and camper row but it needs to be a repeated process.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County • 306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu