

UTCA Safety Committee



Plant Identification The old saying "Leaves of three, Let it be!" is a helpful reminder for identifying poison ivy and oak, but not poison sumac which usually has clusters of 7-13 leaves. Even poison ivy and poison oak may have more than three leaves and their form may vary greatly depending upon the exact species encountered, the local environment, and the season. Being able to identify local varieties of these poisonous plants throughout the seasons and differentiating them from common nonpoisonous look-a-likes are the major keys to avoiding exposure.

Poison Ivy



Photos courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Eastern poison ivy is typically a hairy, ropelike vine with three shiny green (or red in the fall) leaves budding from one small stem
- Western poison ivy is typically a low shrub with three leaves that does not form a climbing vine
- May have yellow or green flowers and white to green-yellow or amber berries

Poison Oak



Photos courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Typically a shrub with leaves of three, similar to poison ivy.
- Pacific poison oak may be vine-like
- May have yellow or green flowers and clusters of green-yellow or white berries

Poison Sumac



Photos courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Woody shrub that has stems that contain 7-13 leaves arranged in pairs
- May have glossy, pale yellow, or cream-colored berries

Exposure- Workers may become exposed to urushiol through:

- Direct contact with the plant
- Indirect contact, such as touching tools, livestock, or clothing that have urushiol on them
- Inhalation of particles containing urushiol from burning plants

Symptoms- Signs/symptoms associated with dermal contact with poisonous plants may include:

- Red rash within a few days of contact
- Possible bumps, patches, streaking, or weeping blisters (blister fluids are not contagious)
- Swelling
- Itching

Recommendations for Protecting Workers

Employers should protect their workers from poisonous plants by training them about:

- Their risk of exposure to poisonous plants
- How to identify poisonous plants
- How to prevent exposure to poisonous plants
- What they should do if they are exposed to poisonous plants

Prevention- Workers can prevent contact with poisonous plants by taking these steps:

- Wear long sleeves, long pants, boots, and gloves.
- Barrier skin creams, such as a lotion containing bentoquatam, may offer some protection before contact.
- After use, clean tools with rubbing alcohol (isopropanol or isopropyl alcohol) or soap and lots of water. Urushiol can remain active on the surface of objects for up to 5 years.
- Do not burn plants that may be poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac.

Employers should prevent workers from being exposed to burning poisonous plants whenever possible. However, when exposure to burning poisonous plants is unavoidable, employers should provide workers with:

- A NIOSH-certified half-face piece particulate respirator rated R-95, P-95, or better. This recommendation does NOT apply to wildland firefighters. Firefighters may require a higher level of respiratory protection to protect against possible exposure to combustion products.
- These respirators should protect against exposure to burning poisonous plants, but will not protect against all possible combustion products in smoke, such as carbon monoxide.
- Respirators must be worn correctly and consistently throughout the time they are used.
- For respirators to be effective there must be a tight seal between the user's face and the respirator.
- Respirators must be used in the context of a written comprehensive respiratory protection program (see [OSHA Respiratory Protection standard 29 CFR 1910.134](#)).

First Aid- Workers who have come in contact with poisonous plants should:

- Immediately rinse skin with rubbing alcohol, specialized poison plant washes, degreasing soap (such as dishwashing soap) or detergent, and lots of water.
- Scrub under nails with a brush.
- Apply wet compresses, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream to the skin to reduce itching and blistering.
- An antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can be taken to help relieve itching.
- In severe cases or if the rash is on the face or genitals, seek professional medical attention.
- Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room if the worker is suffering a severe allergic reaction, such as swelling or difficulty breathing, or has had a severe reaction in the past.

Date: _____ *Attended By:* _____

