

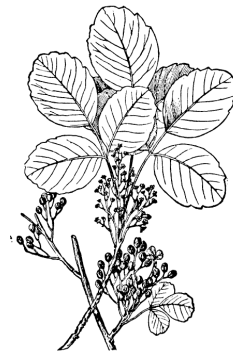


POISON OAK

There aren't many things worse than working in the yard or playing outdoors and coming in contact with poison oak! In most cases, you don't even know you have it until the rash and itching begins. Let's take a look at how to recognize it, and how to get rid of it.

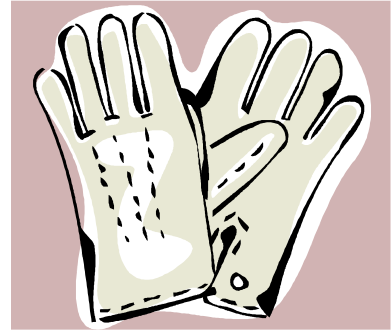
Recognizing Poison Oak – “leaves of three let it be” says it best when trying to identify poison oak. Shiny when younger, the leaves grow in groups of 3; the middle being larger than the two on its sides. New shoots tend to be reddish green in color and droopy, solid green during the season, and turn a brilliant orange to red fall color. The leaf edges may be irregularly toothed, lobed or smooth, and can range from 2 inches to 8 inches long. Poison oak can be found growing in many different forms – growing lower than the height of a mowed lawn (vining right in the turf), as a low or tall shrub, or as a woody vine growing in or on existing trees and shrubs (the vine attaches with aerial roots that makes a mature vine look like a fuzzy rope). It is very good at hiding and disguising its look! Poison oak flowers in the spring (greenish white clusters) and produces gray-white berries. It can be found growing along roadways, fence lines, stone walls, woodlands, stream banks, landscape, and flower beds and in the turf. We've got to remember, all parts of this plant are poisonous!

Reactions to Poison Oak – The oil in poison oak (“urushiol”) is found in all parts of the plant and is released when the plant is crushed or bruised. It is also released into smoke if the plant is burned, so never ever burn poison oak, no matter how old and dead the vines or stems may seem. Wood cutters using chain saws can also inhale urushiol that was volatilized during the cutting process. If your skin comes in contact with poison oak, wash immediately with soap and cool water. Consult a physician if an allergic reaction is severe. Contrary to popular belief, the oils are not spread by contact with open sores. But, the tacky poisonous oils can be spread by contact with pets, garden tools, gloves, shoes, golf balls, or anything that comes in contact with the poison oak plant. Skin lotions are now available to help protect against urushiol, but even so, still cover up with long sleeves, plastic gloves, and regular gloves. When finished take off the gloves, then the shirt, other clothes, and the plastic gloves last, so that you're never touching any contaminated material. Next, place contaminated clothes in a bag and throw them away. If saving the clothes, wash them by themselves. Don't torch them, and wash your hands with soap and cool water. A shower, as a precautionary measure is recommended.



Controlling Poison Oak – There are several options for controlling poison oak in the landscape, but before doing anything, make sure you are protected from the plant touching your skin, and be careful handling the plant and any equipment being used that is exposed to the plant. Winter, when the poison oak is dormant or semi-dormant is recommended. Grabbing or hand pulling, especially when there is good moisture in the ground, is very effective at removal. Be sure to get as many roots as you can.

Again, make sure you are careful handling the plants and its parts. Vines can be severed at the ground, causing the tops to die. If regrowth appears at the base, treat with a non selective herbicide like Roundup or Kleenup. Direct spraying of the foliage when non selective herbicides will work, but may take repeated applications. This is easy to do in open areas, but a bit more challenging in planted areas or in the lawn. Spot treating the leaves will be needed. These sprays can only be applied when the plant is in full leaf and actively growing.



Once you poison oak dies from cutting, pulling, hoeing, spraying, etc, you'll still need to get rid of the poisonous plants and its parts! Throw it away. Put it in a plastic trash bag and tie it closed. Next, double bag it so your garbage man doesn't get the poison oil. Remember, dead or alive, the oil still exists in the plant, so be sure to always protect yourself. Take your time, use skin barrier lotions, then gloves and other protection. Always remember it's on the 'other' protection so be careful when taking it off.

Here along the Central Coast, poison oak is very common. Given the right care and attention while removing, your property will be yours to enjoy. Our staff at McShane's is here to help you with both containment and removal. Don't hesitate to ask for our advice and direction.