

**Read more:**

Poison ivy, University of Maryland,  
<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/poison-ivy>

Recognizing Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia,  
<https://www.chop.edu/news/recognizing-poison-ivy-oak-and-sumac>

Take a Poison Ivy Identification quiz at:  
<https://www.poison-ivy.org/poison-ivy-quiz>



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# Leaflets of Three — Let Me Be



## Getting to Know Poison Ivy

*(Toxicodendron radicans)*

**Say it like a botanist:** toks-ee-ko-DEN-dron RAD-ee-kans








**Member of the cashew family, Anacardiaceae**

**Wildlife loves me.** Songbirds and woodpeckers eat my berries. Deer and rabbits eat my leaves. Snakes and frogs like to shelter under my leaves. Insects, beetles, flies, bees, wasps, ants, and butterflies love my flowers for its nectar.

**About me:**

- I am a native plant and grow almost everywhere. While I can be a shrub, usually I am a woody vine with green or reddish-brown stems that send out hairy rootlets along my stem so I can cling and climb trees, fences, walls, and other things.
- All my parts (leaflets, vine, roots) contain an oil called urushiol (say it, yr-OO-shee-aal. My young leaflets, leaves and bark contain the highest amount of this toxic oil.
- My shiny green leaves are compound and always alternate on my vine. I usually have three leaflets on a stalk. The middle leaflet is always on a longer stalk, the other two attach directly to the vine and are always opposite each other. I sometimes hide my identity with leaflets that can appear in groups of 5 or 7 or even 9.
- My glossy leaflets can be smooth with rounded edges with a pointy tip, Or my edges can be jagged and appear shallow lobed. In the fall, my leaves turn red or reddish yellow. I have white berries in spring.
- Poison ivy never has thorns. It never has a square back leaf.
- When you touch any of my parts, urushiol will penetrate your skin and break out into red itchy bumps that will last a long time. Wash off the urushiol using running water within about 10 minutes dish soap or rubbing alcohol. **Soaps that soften dry skin will only spread urushiol and enlarge the itchy area.**

Poison Ivy and Its Look-Alikes

	Poison Ivy	Virginia Creeper	Jack in the Pulpit	Hog Peanut	Boxelder	Wild Summer Grape	Porcelain Berry
	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	<i>Arisaema triphyllum</i>	<i>Amphicarpaea bracteata</i>	<i>Acer negundo</i>	<i>Vitis aestivalis</i>	<i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i>
							
Key References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Middle leaflet is always larger and has a long stalk</li><li>• Leaflet margins can be smooth, wavy, lobed or irregularly toothed (not saw-toothed)</li><li>• Leaves turn red in fall</li><li>• Woody stem/vine with brown aerial hairs to attach to objects</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually 5 serrated leaflets from a center point. An unusual Virginia creeper has three leaflets, but the middle leaflet does not have a stem</li><li>• Climbs using dark brown aerial roots tendrils that have sucker disks on end to objects</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Each plant has one or two leaves</li><li>• Leaves are 3-oval leaflets on a fleshy stalk that is about the same height at the leaflets.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaves are 3-broad leaflets with smooth margins, middle leaflet is on longer stalk.</li><li>• Very thin twining vine that coils around other plant stems</li><li>• Leaves turn yellow or gold in fall</li><li>• Colorful pea-like flowers hang in clusters in August and September</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Young leaves have three leaflets with a longer center leaflet</li><li>• Leaves appear on stalks with a red or pink tint</li><li>• Leaves are opposite on the stem</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple lobed leaves alternate on woody vine with tendrils</li><li>• Stems rounded; branching tendrils grow opposite the leaves.</li><li>• Tendrils do not have adhesive tips</li><li>• Bark reddish brown with long splits and coarse peeling strips</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>INVASIVE</b>, non-native</li><li>• Leaf shapes vary on vine, alternate</li><li>• Deeply lobed (3-5) leaves with coarse toothed margins; leaf ovate with heart-shaped base; fine hairs on underside of leaf</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• White waxy berries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blue berries on red stems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bright red berries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seeds are in pea-like brown pods</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dark berries downward on vine</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flowers &amp; dark berries upright on vine</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaves alternate on the stem.</li><li>• Middle leaflet is always on a long stalk.</li><li>• Never has thorns</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Palmate leaves originate from single point [leaflets do not have stalk]</li><li>• Alternate on vine</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One or two leaves, each on own stalk</li><li>• Large, cylindrical hooded flower in spring</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alternating leaves on thin, twining vine</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaves are opposite on the stem</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple lobed leaves</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bark does not peel</li></ul>