

# Identifying Poison Ivy



Poison ivy

Many people are affected each year from contact with plants they did not know were harmful. If they had known how to identify these plants, they could have escaped some painful skin irritations.

Poison ivy is known by many names because of its wide variation of appearance in different locations. Some poison ivy has heavy, rough, woody vines. Others are trailing shrubs that run on the ground, and some are erect, woody shrubs.

The leaf shape varies on different plants as well as on the same plant. One thing remains the same: there are always three leaflets. Remember, “leaflets three, let it be.”

Flowers and fruit are always in clusters on slender stems that are attached to the branches where the leaves come out. The berries have a white, waxy appearance. After the leaves have shed, the waxy white berries are an easy way to identify poison ivy. Some poison ivy fruit looks like a peeled orange; others are hairy, and some are smooth.

There are two types of poison ivy in Mississippi. Oakleaf ivy has leaflets similar to white oak leaves. It is also known as poison oak. This form of ivy usually does not climb as a vine but is found as a low-growing shrub. Common poison ivy grows in many places as a shrub. It also grows as a vine in some localities.

Other vines are sometimes confused with poison ivy. These plants are Virginia creeper and some forms of Boston ivy.



Poison ivy



Virginia creeper

Neither of these vines is poisonous. You can recognize Virginia creeper by its five leaflets radiating from one point of attachment. ("Leaves of five, let it thrive.") Boston ivy, with three leaflets, is hard to tell from its poisonous brother. It is best to avoid plants and vines that look like poison ivy.

Poison sumac, a third member of the poison ivy family, is different because it usually is a shrub or even a small tree up to 25 feet tall. The leaves are 7 to 15 inches long and have 7 to 13 leaflets attached to a central stem. The berries of poison sumac are also ivory or white and formed in clusters. Poison sumac is usually found in permanently wet swamps or moist bottomlands. It is not as abundant as poison ivy and poison oak.



Virginia creeper

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Distributed in Mississippi by **Dr. Bronson Strickland**, Associate Extension Professor, Wildlife, Fisheries, & Aquaculture.



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