

**Problem:** Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans* (L.) Kuntze or *Toxicodendron rydbergii* (Small ex Rydberg) Greene)



**Description:** Poison ivy is a native woody plant found throughout Kansas. There are two types of poison ivy found in Kansas. In the eastern portion of the state (primarily east of US 283 highway) the predominant form is [*Toxicodendron radicans* (L.) Kuntze]. In the western half of the state the predominant form will be Rydberg's poison ivy [*Toxicodendron rydbergii* (Small ex Rydberg) Greene]. Rydberg's poison ivy will be generally found west of US 77 highway.

The two forms have very similar growth habits and nearly identical leaf structures. Rydberg's poison ivy will tend to be more of a dwarf non-climbing shrub. The eastern form can be a small to large shrub, a low growing groundcover or an aggressive vine. Thick vines growing with trees that are attached to trees with numerous hairy aerial roots are probably poison ivy. Virginia creeper and woodbine are also vines that climb trees but each has 5-leaflets per leaf rather than 3. Poison oak and poison sumac are not found in Kansas.

**Identification:** One of the key identification characteristics of poison ivy is the leaf. Poison ivy has a compound leaf made up of 3 leaflets. The individual leaflets can be 1 to 4 inches long. The middle leaflet is the only one with a long stalk; the other two are closely attached to the petiole (leaf stem). Leaves can be many different shades of green and may have a glossy leaf surface or a dull surface. The edges of the leaflets are often smooth but they can also be toothed or lobed. The same plant can have several different leaf shapes. New leaves will often be a different shade of green than older mature leaves. In the autumn, or after being cut or sprayed with herbicides, the leaves develop a beautiful scarlet color.

A common vine that may be found growing with poison ivy is Virginia creeper. Woodbine closely resembles Virginia creeper but has tendrils and Virginia creeper has none. An easy way to distinguish between either Virginia creeper and woodbine and poison ivy is that the former two have compound leaves made up of five leaflets rather than three and the berries will be blue. Neither Virginia creeper nor woodbine is poisonous.

**Recommendations:** Poison ivy should be removed from areas of the yard where people frequent. This removal should not be attempted by someone who is sensitive to poison ivy. Using a power mower or weed eater in areas with poison ivy needs to be done with care as sap and sap covered vegetation can become airborne and land on the operator causing a risk of a reaction. In areas with desirable ornamental plants, hand pulling or grubbing may be the best control. This should only be attempted when the soil is wet. Hand pulling works best on small seedlings before they are very old.

Large vines growing with trees may not be able to be removed without injuring the roots of the trees. Cut the vine at ground level. The above ground portion can be removed from the tree. The cut stump can be carefully treated with a brush and stump herbicide. Great care needs to be taken not to damage the desirable vegetation with the herbicide. In fence rows, grassy areas, or waste areas, herbicides are probably the most effective control.

Several herbicides are available which offer good control of poison ivy. Several products are labeled as "Poison Ivy Killers". Several of these are premixed, ready to use products containing the active ingredient triclopyr. Glyphosate (Round-up, Kleen-up and others), 2,4-D and dicamba (Banvel) also offer fair to good control of poison ivy. Once a treatment is made wait 3 to 4 weeks for the product to work before applying any additional herbicide. Label directions need to be read and followed and great care exercised since these chemicals can not differentiate between poison ivy and other plants. Follow all safety precautions when using any chemical and avoid spraying non-target plants.

If you do not feel comfortable trying to control poison ivy yourself either through mechanical control or herbicides it is best to hire it done by a lawn care professional.

### **References:**

Above information adapted from "[Poison Ivy: An Identification and Control Guide](#)", Chuck Otte

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