



KEEP SAFE

A Monthly Publication for Texas Electric Cooperatives

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Stay on the prowl for poisonous plants

As the sun beats down and temperatures rise, poisonous plants may be the last thing on your mind. But if you work outside, they are as real a threat as sun and heat.

Can you identify ivy?

In much of North America, the most common hazardous plant is poison ivy. It comes in three forms: a weed mixed in among grasses, a small bush in a fence row or a climbing vine on a tree.

Poison ivy is fairly easy to spot. Each dark green stem has three shiny oval-shaped leaflets, with white flowers in late summer and white berries in early fall. Also in the fall, the leaves turn dark red or purple. Even in winter, despite its brown and brittle appearance, poison ivy still contains urushiol, the oil that results in an itchy rash.

You need not even contact a damaged plant to be exposed to urushiol. It sticks to leather, animal fur, clothing and gardening instruments. Even when it's being destroyed by fire, poison ivy can send the oil up in smoke, posing a threat to your eyes, mouth and lungs.

Watch for a rash of symptoms

If you come into contact with poison ivy, wash with soapy water as soon as possible. It takes a while for the oil to set in, so if you wash quickly enough, you might be able to prevent a reaction. If you are sensitive to poison ivy, a red itchy rash will appear within 12 to 48 hours. Blistering and severe itching may follow. The blisters should crust over and heal in 10 to 14 days.

Treatment is a lot like the common cold. You can soothe the symptoms, but mostly you just have to ride it out. To relieve itching, try an over-the-counter lotion such as calamine or zinc

oxide. A doctor may prescribe hydrocortisone cream for more severe cases.

If symptoms do not show improvement or worsen, contact your health care provider immediately. If you have trouble breathing, feel faint as a result of the rash, or if your eyes, skin, throat or breathing are irritated by smoke from burning poisonous plants, seek emergency care.

Do not eat out

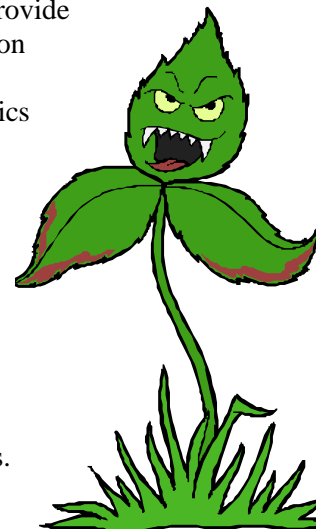
Ingestion is another source of plant poisonings. Do not eat any plant while in the field because you never know if it's poisonous. Do not be fooled by animals; a squirrel or bird can munch on a plant that humans cannot eat safely. If you ingest the berries or leaves of a plant such as poison ivy, you may require emergency medical care.

Get to know villains

If you work outdoors, you may run across more than the common ivy. Companies should provide employees with a plant identification manual with color photos, to help them learn the specific characteristics of poisonous plants in their region. Here are more poisonous plants to watch out for:

◆ **Poison oak.** A shrub or vine that resembles poison ivy; it has three to five leaflets and yellowish berries in the fall. It is very common in wooded areas.

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(poisonous plants continued from page 1)

◆ **Poison sumac.** A larger shrub (4 to 6 feet high) with 7 to 13 leaflets. Similar to poison ivy, it produces white berries and its leaves turn orangish-red in the fall. You will usually find it in damp areas like bogs and swamps or roadside ditches where water collects.

◆ **Ragweed.** The culprit behind hay fever can incite symptoms such as swollen skin, watery eyes and a runny nose. A member of the sunflower family, this plant displays yellow-green flowers in the summer and fall and can grow up to 8 feet tall.

◆ **Stinging nettles.** This low-growing plant with heart shaped leaves and stems covered with tiny hair-like needles is common in wooded areas. Its sting is followed by burning, itching and/or a straight line of small blisters.

◆ **Sacred datura.** This white flower looks like an upturned umbrella. Most common at elevations above 3,500 feet, it is sometimes called “moon lily” because its flowers open at night. Some people develop a skin rash from contact with the stem or flower. Other species of datura also are poisonous.

Dress for success

Disposable or washable rubber gloves are recommended because the resins that cause a reaction can get into cloth and leather and infect you the next time that article of clothing is

handled or worn. Long-sleeved shirts tucked into gloves and long pants tucked into socks work well.

If you do come into contact with a poisonous plant, be careful not to touch exposed skin with infected clothing. Take the infected clothes off carefully to make sure you do not touch your skin with them. Launder these clothes separately, and run a wash cycle to rinse the washer container before laundering other clothing. Since urushiol can stay potent for years, act quickly in cleaning infected items.

Prevention is key

Apply barrier creams before working in areas with poisonous plants to prevent skin irritations. Immunization to these plants is available to some outdoor workers in constant contact with them. Check with your health care provider for more information.

Education and prevention are the best ways to steer clear of poisonous plants. Familiarize yourself with the plants of your region, dress to keep urushiol off your skin and out of your airways, and you will stay reaction-free at work and play.

— 5 minute safety talk
National Safety Council

Ease lower back pain with helpful exercises

About 6 million people a year see a physician because of lower back pain. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends the following exercises to help reduce lower back pain.

❖ **Wall slides:** Stand with your back against a wall and feet shoulder-width apart. Slide down into a crouch with knees bent to about 90 degrees. Count to five and slide back up the wall. Repeat five times.

❖ **Leg raises:** Lie on your back with your arms at your sides and your lower back against the floor. Lift one leg off the floor. Hold your leg up for a count of 10. Return it to the floor. Do the same with the other leg. Repeat five times with each leg. If this is too difficult, keep one knee bent and the foot flat on the ground while raising the other leg.

❖ **Back leg swing:** Stand behind a chair with your hands on the back of the chair. Make sure your shoulders are back, and you are standing up straight. Lift one leg back and up while keeping the knee straight. Return slowly. Raise your other leg and return. Repeat five times with each leg.

— Safety+Health

Loss Control School Schedule

Transformer School (<i>Gonzales</i>)	July 7 – 10
Basic Pole Climbing (<i>Robstown</i>)	July 21 – 24
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (<i>Gilmer</i>)	July 21 – 24
Metering School (<i>Tahoka</i>)	August 4 - 7
Hotline 1 – 4 School (<i>Merkel</i>)	August 10 – 14
Troubleshooting School (<i>Tahoka</i>)	August 25 – 28
Hotline 1 – 4 School (<i>Gonzales</i>)	August 31 - Sept 4
Hotline 1 – 4 School (<i>Levelland</i>)	September 14 – 18
Transformer School (<i>Sulpher Springs</i>)	September 15 – 18
Underground School (<i>McGregor</i>)	September 21 - 25
Hotline 1 – 4 School (<i>Livingston</i>)	October 5 – 9
Underground School (<i>Levelland</i>)	October 12 – 16
Basic Pole Climbing (<i>Quitman</i>)	October 13 - 16
Underground School (<i>Merkel</i>)	October 19 – 23
Basic Pole Climbing (<i>Hondo</i>)	October 27 - 30

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