

PLAYING IT SAFE



Avoiding Poisonous Plants at Camp

Know what to look for to prevent discomfort

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, approximately 85% of the population will develop an allergic reaction when exposed to poisonous plants, such as stinging nettle and poison ivy, oak and sumac. As a result, camp employees like you need to take the necessary precautions to protect against these plants and remain illness-free when working outdoors.

How Are Plants Dangerous?

Unlike nonpoisonous plants, stinging nettle and poison oak, ivy and sumac contain a chemical called urushiol, which causes rashes, blisters and constant itching. Urushiol can stick to your tools and your clothing, so when you touch these items, you may experience a reaction. Urushiol that rubs off from broken plants onto other objects can remain potent for years, depending on your environment.

What Do Poisonous Plants Look Like?

The general rule is that if the plant has “leaves of three, let it be.” However, many plants have groups of five to nine leaves. The following sections outline other ways to identify poisonous plants.

Poison Ivy

This plant possesses the following characteristics:

- Grows near lakes and streams in the

Midwest and East

- Has a woody, rope-like vine, a trailing shrub on the ground or a free-standing shrub
- Normally has three leaves but could have more, which are green in the summer and red in the fall
- Has yellow or green flowers and white berries

Poison Oak

This plant possesses the following characteristics:

- Grows as a low shrub from New Jersey to Texas and as a tall vine along the Pacific coast
- Contains oak-like leaves in clusters of three with clumps of yellow berries

Poison Sumac

This plant possesses the following characteristics:

- Grows in boggy areas, especially in the Southeast
- Grows as a shrub up to 15 feet tall with seven to 13 smooth-edged leaves
- Has a glossy, pale yellow or cream-colored berry

Be safe and healthy on the job at **your place of employment** with these helpful tips provided by **Bitner Henry Insurance Group**.

If you develop a severe reaction to poison oak, ivy, sumac or stinging nettle, your doctor may prescribe a topical or oral hydrocortisone to halt your reaction.

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Stinging Nettle

This plant possesses the following characteristics:

- Grows several feet high in clumps all over the United States
- Covered in tiny hairs that stick to skin using histamines, which may cause itchiness and irritation

Treatment

If you have a reaction to a poisonous plant while working outdoors, follow these treatment steps:

- Cleanse exposed skin with rubbing alcohol and wash with the area with water. Then, take a shower with soap and warm water. Do not use soap until the second washing, because you could initially move the urushiol around on the skin with the soap.
- Wipe clothing, shoes, tools, etc. off with rubbing alcohol and water. Always wear gloves and throw them away when you are done.
- Keep in mind that redness and swelling can appear within 12 to 48 hours after exposure, and blisters and itching may accompany it. The reaction should disappear within 14 to 20 days without treatment, but your body's response to urushiol is often difficult to manage without treatment.
- Use a wet compress and take an oral antihistamine for relief. You can also use a topical hydrocortisone on the affected area to relieve itching.

For more information, consult your supervisor.