

# Poison Oak Safety

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Poison oak's scientific name is *Toxicodendron diversilobum*, *Toxicodendron* meaning it is toxic and *diversilobum* meaning its lobed leaves can be diverse in shape. Although the shape of the leaves can vary, this plant's shiny leaves can always be found in groups of three. Use this rhyme to remember:

*"Leaves of three leave it be  
If it's shiny watch your hiney."*



Leaves are shiny and growing in groups of three



Spring

Summer

Fall

Winter

Poison Oak looks different throughout the year

Poison oak's shiny leaves come from *urushiol*, which is the oil responsible for irritating our skin. There is no safe part of a poison oak plant to touch; urushiol is even on the stems. It can cause redness, blisters, and intense itching which can last 1-3 weeks.

The reaction varies from person to person, but if you think you have come into contact with poison oak there are a few things you can do:

- Remove any clothing it could have touched.
- Urushiol is sticky and will not wash away with water. Use dish soap, laundry detergent, or a poison oak wash or towelette to cleanse your skin, then rinse with plenty of cold water.
- Wash your clothes and note that urushiol will stick to shoes, tools and pet fur.
- If you get a reaction you can use hydrocortisone, calamine lotion, or try an oatmeal bath.

Images courtesy of Oregon Forest Research Institute & The Farmers Almanac

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