

Safety Tips



It starts with Scouts.

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Watch Out for Poison Ivy



Plenty of Scouts and Scouters like to be able to identify different plants when in the bush, but there are some plants that are more important to know than others. One plant that we should know to steer clear of is poison ivy. The name is infamous; almost every Canadian knows that it's a plant that can cause a terribly itchy rash. But do we all know how to avoid it?

Poison ivy is found in every province in Canada except for Newfoundland and Labrador. It grows in a variety of soils and conditions, but you're especially likely to encounter it where the plant has a suitable mix of sun and shade—along shorelines and roadsides, or in forest that's not especially thick. In other words, poison ivy tends to grow where we like to walk, unfortunately.

Okay—so we know to be on our guard. But what are we looking for? Like the old rule of thumb “Leaves of three, let it be”, poison ivy does indeed have leaves that grow in groups of three. The leaves are almond-shaped and bright green, but they can be a dark red on a young plant in the spring, and turn yellow, orange and red in the fall. The centre leaf is larger than the other two. Poison ivy usually occurs as a trailing vine with stalks that grow to less than a metre in height. It can also occur as a climbing vine on rough surfaces, like trees or posts.

If you come in contact with poison ivy, wash with soap and cold water. The resin from the plant is what can cause an itchy rash, so be aware that this resin might be found on your clothing and footwear as easily as your skin. Wash your clothes and shoes with hot, soapy water (wear gloves!) and leave to dry in the sun for a couple of days.

If you develop a rash despite your best precautions, treat with calamine lotion and cold compresses. Don't scratch! Scratching can lead to infection. Consult your doctor for further treatment.

