

OCTOBER 2010

# STEVE'S Weed of the Month

## Western Poison Ivy

**Also Known As:** Ryberg's poison ivy, *Toxicodendron radicans*—Eastern poison ivy

**Western Poison Ivy, *Toxicodendron rydbergii* (Small ex Rydb.) Greene**, is native to North America and reproduces both by seed and underground rootstocks. Poison ivy is best known for causing allergic dermatitis when contact is made with its toxic oil compound, urushiol. Sensitivity to the toxin varies among people and can change over time. While eastern poison ivy is a climbing vine, western poison ivy generally grows upright from a woody main stem and forms a shrub with few branches. The plant stands about 2 feet tall, but can grow to 6–10 feet tall under favorable conditions. The leaves of poison ivy have a reddish tint when young, but change to green as chlorophyll develops and then turn vibrant colors in the fall. The alternately arranged compound leaves have three leaflets (“leaflets three, let it be”) that are broadly oval with pointed tips; the stalk on the middle leaflet is significantly longer than those of the side leaflets. The leaf edges can be smooth or coarsely toothed. Flowering occurs from late spring to early summer and sometimes again in the fall. The small yellowish flowers are arranged in loose sprays at leaf axils; after flowering, the plant produces its fruit—hard berries (dull white when ripe) that hang in loose drooping clusters and persists through the winter.

Western poison ivy is adapted to a wide range of ecological conditions, including prairies, forest openings, ditch banks, floodplains, rocky slopes, roadsides, logged areas, and other disturbed sites. It grows in full to partial sun and often forms fast-growing colonies.



Photo by: AI Schneider @ USDA PLANTS Database



Photo by: Richard Old, XID Services, Inc., Bugwood.org



Photo by: Al Schneider @ USDA PLANTS Database



Photo by: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

## Control Methods

Because contact with poison ivy irritates the skin of most people, protective clothing and gear should be worn when taking measures to control the plant. Afterward, contaminated clothing should be carefully removed and separately laundered as the toxic oil can remain active for an indefinite period. Although the oil compound is not normally air-borne, it can be transmitted as droplets on particles of ash in the smoke of burning plants, so poison ivy plants should not be burned.

**Manual/Physical Control:** Although pulling, digging and cutting poison ivy are effective control methods when the plants' roots are removed, extreme care must be used to protect oneself from the plant's toxic properties.

**Chemical Control:** Applying glyphosate, triclopyr, and 2,4-D can be an effective option for controlling poison ivy during the plant's growing season. Ammonium sulphamate is environmentally safe and has also been used for controlling poison ivy. Several applications of herbicides may be needed.

**[More information can be found in the PNW Weed Management Handbook](#)**

**Use pesticides with care. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.**

**Biological Control:** No parasitic insects are available for this native plant. Grazing animals experience no ill effects from eating poison ivy, but generally avoid it—with the exception of goats that readily eat it. At any rate, intensive grazing must occur over several years to provide effective control.

**Questions:** contact [Steve Van Vleet](#) or phone (509) 397 - 6290