

POISON-IVY

Two species of Poison-Ivy are found in Michigan, both having compound leaves of three and are larger than most other trifoliolate plants. *Toxicodendron radicans* is found in the lower two thirds of the lower peninsula while *Toxicodendron rydbergii* is mainly found in the upper and the upper half of the lower peninsulas as well as further south along the shores of Lakes Michigan and Huron.



Toxicodendron radicans

Toxicodendron radicans is a vigorous vine which creeps along the ground or it may climb. Those that climb may have three to six feet long horizontal branches that are upturned at the ends. Found in open forests and edges, thickets, fence rows, roadsides, river-bottoms, prairies and other open areas of varying moisture conditions. The leaves, in sets of three start out red in color, changing to a bright shiny green and then dark green and laying flat while alternating along the stem. In fall leaves become deep bright red. The strongly veined leaflets have a pointed tip and margins that are quite variable with numerous possibilities. The petioles or leaf stems are often pubescent.



Toxicodendron radicans showing early red leaves (inset) and leaves changing from red to shiny green

The small five petaled, whitish or greenish flowers can be inconspicuous and are often hidden by the leaves, blooming from May to July in clusters of up to 25 on long branches. Whitish to yellowish white berries usually persist through the

winter and are food for over 30 species of birds and other wildlife in Michigan.

Climbing vines can easily be distinguished from other vines by the hairy appearance of the aerial rootlets. *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, Virginia Creeper or Woodbine is the only other Michigan vine with aerial roots, which are much thicker and courser.

Toxicodendron rydbergii, the second species in Michigan can be found in more sandy, gravelly or rocky soils often occurring along lake shores, dunes, roadsides and clearings. In the southern half of the lower peninsula it is found only in sand near Lakes Michigan and Huron.

The leaves are similar to *Toxicodendron radicans*, but may be somewhat folded and the petioles are not pubescent. Because *Toxicodendron rydbergii* has no aerial roots it never climbs



Aerial roots of *T. radicans*



Toxicodendron rydbergii

The irritating, uncomfortable blistering rash and itching associated with Poison-Ivy is an allergic reaction to the poisonous oil *urushiol*, which is in the resin canals of these plants. The oils are active any month of the year when any part of the plant is bruised to break these canals and expose the oil. The oil can be transported on clothing or on pets such as cats and dogs. Small drops of the oil may also be carried by smoke from the burning of Poison-Ivy and inhaled or deposited on one's skin. Allergic reactions occur within one to two days for most people, sooner in those more sensitive. A person's sensitivity may fluctuate making them more or less sensitive at different times.

Should you come in contact with any Poison-Ivy, wipe the affected area as soon as possible with alcohol or wash with soapy water. Wash clothes thoroughly keeping in mind that the oils may remain active for months.

When in doubt, "Leaves of three, let it be" is a good rule to follow.

Selected References

Czarapata, E.J. 2005. *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest*. The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, WI.
MICHIGAN FLORA ONLINE. A. A. Reznicek, E. G. Voss, & B. S. Walters. February 2011. University of Michigan. Web. April 3, 2012.