

FOR HOA BOARDS AND PROPERTY MANAGERS

# Poison ivy on common ground

What it looks like in the fall, where it grows on the Shore,  
and why the cleanup has to be done carefully.

## THE PROBLEM

# Every part of it carries the oil, all year

The rash comes from **urushiol**, an oil in the leaves, stems, roots and vines. It is there in July and it is there on a bare vine in January.

On shared ground, the people who meet it are the residents on the pond path, kids at the wood line, dogs that bring the oil home on their coats, and the crew sent to trim the edges.

The rash usually shows up a day or two later, so the complaint rarely gets traced back to the spot.



**At the foot of a pine**

## **WHERE IT GROWS HERE**

# **Low and easy to walk through**

- Wood edges and fence lines
- Ditch banks and pond buffers
- Under pines, in the needle litter
- Up tree trunks, as a hairy vine



Berries on a vine up a pine

## HOW TO TELL

# Leaves of three, the middle one on a longer stalk

- **Three leaflets** to a leaf. The middle one sits on a longer stalk than the two sides.
- **Edges** smooth, or with a few large teeth. Never a fine saw edge.
- **Shiny or dull**, both are normal. In fall it turns red and orange.
- **Berries** small, whitish, in loose clusters.
- **Old vines** on trees look hairy, covered in brown rootlets.

## UP THE TREES

# A hairy rope on the bark

On a big pine the vine grips the trunk with thousands of brown rootlets. Thick ones run up past head height and hang out over the path. Leaves or no leaves, this carries the oil.



Virginia creeper

## LOOK-ALIKE

# Five leaflets, not three

Virginia creeper climbs the same fences and trees and turns the same red in fall. Count the leaflets: **five from one point**. It is native and not poison ivy, but the dark blue berries are not for eating.



## Blackberry and its relatives

### LOOK-ALIKE

# Three leaflets, with teeth and thorns

Brambles also grow leaves in threes, which is why they get mixed up. Look at the edge: **fine saw teeth** all the way round, and **thorns on the cane**. Poison ivy has neither. Brambles bring their own trouble along a path, but it is a scratch, not a rash.



**Peppervine, running through the grass**

### LOOK-ALIKE

## Many small leaflets, coarse teeth

A native grape relative. Each leaf splits into many small toothed leaflets, it climbs with curly tendrils, and its berries go green to pink to purple to black.

**No rash, but it smothers shrubs.** Pull runners out of beds while small; cut big vines at the base.



Turning red, this week

## FALL AND WINTER

# The season changes, the oil doesn't

- **Red leaves get picked.** In October it is one of the brightest plants on a wood edge, and it ends up in wreaths and table arrangements.
- **Bare vines still carry it.** Clearing brush in winter is no safer.
- **Never burn it.** The smoke carries the oil into the lungs.
- **Never chip it or string-trim it.** Both spray the sap, and chipped vine in a mulch pile spreads it onto every bed it goes to.

# Mark it, keep mowers off it, treat it right

- **Flag the patch** and tell the mowing crew, so nobody runs a trimmer through it.
- **Treat it while it still has leaves.** The plant takes the herbicide down to the roots.
- **Vines on trees:** cut through at the base and treat the cut stump. Pulling a vine off a trunk throws the oil everywhere.
- In Maryland, spraying on property you don't own takes a **licensed pesticide business and a certified applicator.**

IF SOMEONE TOUCHES IT

# Wash fast, then wash everything else

- **Skin:** soap and cool water, as soon as possible. The sooner, the less oil soaks in.
- **Clothes, gloves, tools:** wash them on their own. The oil stays active on them for a long time.
- **Dogs:** bathe them, wearing gloves.
- **See a doctor** for a rash on the face, eyes or a large area, or after breathing smoke from burning plants.



# MARSHALL

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