

March 18, 2015



Poison Oak

By: Kit Smith

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Spring is approaching and that means poison oak will start growing. Poison oak is not a pest, but rather part of the plant community. It thrives in all temperatures, types of soil, moisture and light. Its botanical name is *Toxicodendron diversilobum*.

Poison oak that thrives in the sun is a dense, deciduous woody shrub that grows from one to six feet tall. In more shady areas, it is a climbing vine, like ivy, that grows to the sun, supporting itself with aerial roots. Both the shrub and vine are referred to and identified as poison oak.

Poison oak is most recognizable by its leaflets of three, five, seven or nine with the middle leaflet longer than the side ones. The leaflets are botanically one leaf. The leaves alternate on the stem. Poison oak is also distinguishable by the seasonal leaf colors. In late spring and early summer, the leaves are glossy green and turn orange or red in the fall.

The shape of the poison oak leaf resembles the oak tree leaf, with edges that are toothed or lobed, but it is different in that the oak leaf grows as a single leaf. In spring, the poison oak produces small white-green flowers where the leaves attach to the stem. In the late summer, a round fruit berry is produced.

Many people have allergic reactions and rashes when their skin comes in contact with a bruised, damaged or burned poison oak plant or leaf. Prevent contact, if possible. Wear protective clothing and both washable and plastic gloves. Avoid direct contact with the plant, affected skin and any contaminated tools, animals and clothing. Wash to disinfect all clothing afterwards.

If skin comes in contact with the poison oak allergen, called Urushiol oil, wash the skin thoroughly with soap and lots of water within five minutes of contact.

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Do not burn poison oak. When the allergen oil is burned, it is dispersed through the smoke particles.

To manage poison oak in the yard, remove the entire plant including the roots and treat the area with herbicide. If the roots can not be pulled, cut the plant one to two inches above the soil and completely cover the stump with herbicide. Watch and re-treat as necessary. Always read carefully, and strictly follow, herbicide label directions.

Livestock, sheep, goats and horses and deer eat the tender leaves; additionally deer and birds eat the poison oak berries.

A good way to prevent the presence of poison oak is to cultivate the area with healthy and desired plants.

Join UCCE Master Gardeners today for a free class offered in cooperation with the Cameron Park Community Center: The Art of Growing Succulents. Learn all about these water-saving plants; propagation, growing, feeding, and protection from freezing. The three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Dr, in Cameron Park.

There is no Master Gardener class scheduled for this Saturday, March 21, 2015.

Save the date! The annual Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale is coming up on Saturday, May 2nd at the Veterans Memorial Building parking lot in Placerville. Reasonably-priced veggies, water-efficient landscape plants, and more will be featured. Watch our website for more information.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg> and you can also find us on Facebook.