

# How To Treat Poison Ivy...

## Shiny Leaflets of Three, Let Them Be!



*Poison Ivy* is a common "weed" which grows well throughout Rockland County. (*Posion Oak* and *Sumac* are rare here). About 85% of us are allergic to *Poison Ivy* sap known as *rhus* or *urushiol*. The shiny weeds with "leaflets of three" creep up walls, trees, fences, and shrubs. Clothing, animals, tools, etc. can all carry the sap if they contact these weeds. *Poison Ivy* sap can stay on these items for a very long time. A 1,000 year old Chinese tomb piece lacquered with *urushiol* still causes a rash when touched!

At the first sign of exposure or rash, wash off the sap with soap and water (shower don't bathe). Once the sap is washed off, the rash is **not** contagious. Oatmeal baths and oral antihistamines help with the intense itching. We like cetirizine (*Zyrtec*) during the day as it is less sedating and prefer diphenhydramine (*Benadryl*) at bedtime. Both are available as generics without a prescription. Avoid antihistamine creams as they can worsen the rash. Cold compresses, and cortisone cream can help. Wash all clothing, towels, sheets, tools, etc. which might carry the sap.

Children with more than a mild *poison ivy* rash should be seen in our office to determine if prescription steroid ointments (many times stronger than non-prescription strength) or oral steroids are required. These prescriptions are safe and provide tremendous relief.

Occasionally the rash becomes infected when scratched, and antibiotics may be needed. Try to prevent this with good handwashing using antibacterial soap. Keep fingernails short and wash under the nails, a common site for bacteria to grow.

## How can you avoid Posion Ivy if you don't know what it looks like?



Learn to avoid contact with *Poison Ivy* if possible. Study pictures of it on the internet and have someone who knows it well point it out to you. It grows in all of our neighborhoods! It changes it's look during the season: bright green in Spring, darker green in Summer, and red in the fall. A preparation called *Ivy Block* and *Ivy Shield* are available without prescription and may help to prevent gardeners and hikers from these saps. Try to remove poison ivy from your yard and children's play areas. *Tecnu Poison Oak-Poison Ivy cleaner* is an effective soap to remove the sap.

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