

Poison Ivy

Poison ivy! *Rhus toxicodendron*. Just the thought of getting a painful itchy poison ivy rash will keep quite a few people from getting out and enjoying the outdoors. Even those who do not know if they are allergic to poison ivy are wary of roaming into areas where this plant is abundant. This is tragic. We should never miss out on any outdoor fun because we fear a plant. Especially when we can neutralize the effects of poison ivy naturally.

It is hard to predict if and when someone will develop a reaction to poison ivy. People who have “ruddy” complexions are usually not affected by poison ivy. But then, there are some fair complected people who are not affected by the oils in poison ivy either. Usually, a person’s resistance to the plant will diminish with each exposure. This is why some individuals, who for years have never been affected by poison ivy, acquire a blistering rash. At any rate, the best way to make sure that you do not get a case of poison ivy is to immunize yourself. And the easiest way to immunize you is to ingest poison ivy.

The first step in immunizing yourself is to gather a young budding poison ivy leaf in the spring with a pair of tweezers, and eat it. Then, as the leaves grow, you will consume one leaf per day until you are “stuffing down” a mature leaf. And, I mean stuffing. The less chewing you do, the better. Big leaves should be cut down to pieces that you can swallow whole. After you have “finished off” a mature leaf, the immunization process, which can take three to four weeks, is completed.

If you can not get yourself to munch on a poison ivy leaf, you can encapsulate the leaves and swallow them as a daily medication. Encapsulating them is a wiser choice, because you do not run the risk of introducing the leaves’ poison oil to the skin around the mouth and lips. If you are just going to “pop” them in your mouth, make sure you are using tweezers and that you do not make any contact with your skin. The mucus membrane inside your mouth will protect it from any harmful effects. Always drink a glass of water after you ingest poison ivy.

If you missed the fresh spring leaves, you can cut a mature poison ivy leaf one eighth of an inch wide and one half inch long, and ingest it. Gradually increase the size of the cut out leaf pieces until you reach the dimensions of a mature leaf. If any physical problem occurs that seems to be related to your consumption of poison ivy, discontinue its use and contact your doctor. But, I never found or have heard of anyone having a physical problem occurring from this method of poison ivy immunization.

The immunization will last for one year, more or less. For me, it lasted almost two years, and for the herbalist who taught me this “trick,” it lasted a little less than a year. So, for most people, it is best to repeat the procedure every year, even though it is possible that just one three to four week immunization period will be enough to last a lifetime.

This immunization does not mean that you are able to roll around in a poison ivy patch. The amount of immunity is different for every person. Even though you might be able to roll around in poison ivy, it is not worth the risk. But if you immunize yourself in this way, you will be able to walk through a poison ivy patch with no ill effects.

Immunizing yourself from poison ivy in this way is not a far-fetched idea. Your doctor, at your request, will immunize you by injecting you with a series of poison ivy extract. I personally love the alternative of immunizing myself, because I hate shots, and despise the idea of paying someone to stick me with a sharp implement even more.

If you do not want to ingest poison ivy, there are certain plants you can use that will neutralize the affects of poison ivy. Jewelweed is one of these plants. Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) grows in many parts of the United States and Canada. It prefers shady, damp areas. You usually can find it growing along creeks and riverbanks. Jewelweed is easy to identify. And, its habit of producing dense colonies makes it stand out like a “sore thumb.”

Any part of the jewelweed plant can be mashed up and applied on the skin to cure many types of dermatitis. This is more than confidently stated, as jewelweed has been scientifically proven to contain a highly potent antifungal agent. But, it should be remembered that the sooner it is applied to an affected area, the better. If you wait until the poison ivy blisters appear to apply jewelweed, the healing affect will be minimal.

A family friend had a rash on her ankle that would not go away. She said the doctors could do nothing for her. I told her how jewelweed cured my poison ivy and that it might heal her rash. She was willing to try anything at this point. I collected some jewelweed and told her to boil the weeds in water for twenty minutes, then take the extract and freeze it in ice cube trays. In this way, she had the fresh extract at her disposal. After a week of applying the extract twice a day, the rash disappeared.

Jewelweed has a very positive medicinal reputation and is also edible, but it is not for everyone. There are a small percentage of people whose body chemistry produces an adverse response to jewelweed. If this happens, the curative becomes part of the problem, and a mild case of a poison ivy might be accelerated into a full blown “blistering hell” with the application of jewelweed. So test your bodily reaction to jewelweed before applying it to any dermatitis.

Plantain (*Plantago* sap.) is a very common yard weed that is also an effective curative for a poison ivy rash. Its effectiveness is derived from two remarkable abilities. One is that the juice in its leaves and seeds shrink tissue; the other is that it neutralizes poisons. Unlike jewelweed, it is not native to the United States. But, a few different varieties of plantains

have naturalized themselves to North America, which has made it more abundant and easier to find than jewelweed. This is another plant you can throw into the salad and eat.

One of the best ways to externally apply plantain is to mash the fresh leaves into a small ball and use a wrapping to secure them to an itchy area or any insect bites or sting. You will find that it takes the itch or the sting out almost immediately. The longer the plantain compress is left on poison ivy irritation, the better the long-term results. Bug bites and stings are healed more readily. So unless you are allergic to the venom of your insect attacker, the compress can be removed once the pain or itch subsides. It is amazing that such a powerful healing plant is so close to our fingertips.

For some people, jewelweed is a more effective curative for poison ivy, and in others, plantain. Most people do not know which plant will do a better job for them. So it's best to gather both types of plants and combine them together in a crushed up mixture, or preserve them in a tincture. This is accomplished by filling up any size container half way with at least 80% proof white whiskey, and then adding whole jewelweed and plantain plants to fill up the rest of the container. Shake up the mixture every couple of days until it is mixed well. This tincture will last indefinitely.

Even in the winter, poison ivy can be a hazard. The leaves are gone, but the vine and especially the berries still contain oils that can cause the poison ivy dermatitis. But there should be no worries because we have immunized ourselves last spring. If that wears off prematurely, we have stored other curatives in the freezer or in a tincture. Our only concern now is to plan our next adventure in the outdoors!