

Outsmart The Itch This Summer: Learn The Facts About Poison Ivy, Oak & Sumac



Poison Ivy



Poison Oak



Poison Sumac

(NAPSA)—Adventure racing champion and firefighter Robyn Benincasa is considered an expert when it comes to poison ivy, oak and sumac—she literally runs into these plants as many as 12 times a year while on, and off, the trails.

“Whether I’m racing through a forest, rock climbing or simply on the trails around my neighborhood, nearly every time I’m outside, I’m at risk of becoming exposed to these nasty plants,” says Benincasa.

But you don’t have to be an extreme athlete to encounter ivy, oak or sumac. Simple activities like hiking and gardening can put you face-to-face with one of them.

The American Academy of Dermatology estimates that each year up to 50 million Americans will develop allergic reactions to urushiol, the toxic oil found in the sap of these plants. Because they grow nearly everywhere in the U.S., knowing how to identify them and other helpful facts ahead of time can ensure an itch-free summer.

The Itchy Three

Poison Ivy: Three or five serrated-edged, pointed leaflets. Grows as a vine or as a free-standing plant.

Poison Oak: Three oak-like leaves. Grows as shrubs. In the fall, it produces whitish flowers and leaves that turn yellow and then red.

Poison Sumac: Seven to 13 stag-

gered leaflets with one on the tip of the plant. Grows as a shrub or small tree in peat bogs and swamps. Fruits grow between the leaf and the branch.

Beat The Itch

Urushiol attaches to the skin within minutes. If you think you’ve come into contact with ivy, oak or sumac, immediately cleanse the area and any items you may have touched with soap and water. Keep in mind that the oil can remain active for up to five years and live on items like shoes, garden tools, clothing—even pets.

Available Relief

If you do develop an allergic reaction—commonly identified by itching, swelling, redness, bumps and blisters—there are several products available that temporarily relieve the symptoms. Zanfel™ Poison Ivy, Oak & Sumac Wash, a non-prescription product, is available in the first-aid section at chain and independent pharmacies. It is recommended by physicians and clinically proven to actually remove urushiol, the cause of the allergic reaction. Once the toxin is removed, the itching stops within seconds and the body can begin to heal. Visit www.zanfel.com or call 1-800-401-4002 for more information.

If you are experiencing swelling, enlarged glands or fever, see your doctor immediately.