



***Toxicodendron radicans* (L.) Kuntze**
Poison-ivy

Anacardiaceae (Cashew Family)

Blooming season: Summer.

Plant:

Perennial.

Two forms: ivy-like and low shrub.

Also two varieties (in Michigan): var. *radicans*, often vigorous climber; can have horizontal branches up to 1 m long. Var. *Rydbergii* (Rydb.)

Greene has no aerial roots and is unable to climb; it is found in the northern portion of range in Michigan, and south along shores of Lakes Huron and Michigan. (Voss 1985).

Often forming large patches.



Leaves:

Leaf formed of leaflets three; terminal leaflet with longer petiole.

Petioles often have red tinge.

Alternate leaves, sparsely and coarsely toothed.

Leaflets often somewhat folded on midrib, becoming “trough-like” (Voss 1985 p. 534)

Somewhat shiny, pale to mid-green, turning yellow and orange in fall.



Flower:

Axillary, tiny white flowers.

Fruit:

Clusters of white drupes.

Can be confused with:

When green, can be confused with seedlings of box-elder, *Acer negundo*, with opposite leaves. The “leaflets three, let it be” rhyme asks one to confuse it with many harmless plants.



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Poison-ivy

Geographic range:

Type specimen location:

State: Throughout - see description above under "Plant".

Regional: One variety or another found throughout the United States and lower Canada.



Habitat:

Local: Riparian and edge of area leading to creek path.

Regional: Woods, thickets, and open ground.

Common local companions: Oaks and maples

Usages:

Human:

Poison ivy leaves were used medicinally by some Native Americans both as a tonic tea and applied as a treatment for ringworm. They also used it as a black dye, which use was continued by settlers; an additional use was as an ink (Vogel 1970).

Schletky (1964) speculates that they were willing to use it only because a black color is difficult to set. Voss considers *Toxicodendron radicans* var. *radicans* to be the "commonest source of allergic disease in the United States". Because the allergic reaction is often delayed by days (sometimes up to a week), except for unusually susceptible individuals, it is difficult to associate the looks of the plant with its harmful effects. The responsible oil, urushiol, or 3-*n* penladecycatechnol, can also get on clothing and pets, and then affect the person wearing or handling them. Prompt washing with soap and water will remove the excess oil and limit the damage. The plant should never be burnt, as the smoke will have the oil in it, and breathing it can create severe problems.



Animal:

Birds are reported to eat the fruits without harm.

Why is it called *that*?

Toxicarius is Latin for poisonous, and *dendro* means tree (since there are tree forms in this genus). *Radicans* refers to rooting stems, aerial roots, typical of one form of *T.radicans*. The name poison-ivy needs no explanation to anyone who has known someone affected by it. The genus *Toxicodendron* was formerly part of the genus *Rhus*, which has been split, *Rhus* now including only those species without urushiol, and *Toxicodendron* those containing it.