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Identifying poison ivy is important

K-State horticulture expert says poison ivy grows in various forms

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Most people accept that avoiding poison ivy is good advice, but Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini said doing so starts with correctly identifying the allergenic plant.

Domenghini said poison ivy grows in multiple forms with varying leaf appearances. Three varieties of poison ivy include erect woody shrub, climbing woody vine and groundcover.

“In the vining habit, aerial roots give the vines a fuzzy, rope-like appearance. As a groundcover, poison ivy is often confused with Virginia creeper or Woodbine,” Domenghini said. “Poison ivy shrubs can appear in fields, pastures, woods or even the home garden.”

Domenghini describes the many leaf margins as toothed, incised, lobed or smooth, but notes that poison ivy typically appears with leaves in groups of three.

“The leaf size can vary, but the middle leaflet is the only one with a long stalk and is larger than the other two. The other two leaves are closely attached to the petiole (leaf stem),” Domenghini said.

When removing poison ivy plants, Domenghini recommends wearing pants, long sleeves and gloves, and washing clothing and skin to remove traces of plant toxins when complete.

“In the groundcover form, direct spray or grubbing (digging) are common strategies for removal. Make sure the soil is moist before grubbing out the plants, including the root systems,” Domenghini said.

Herbicides may also be used on the shrub form of poison ivy.

“Direct spray is a common control method. For woody vines of poison ivy, cut the plant off at the base and treat the emerging sprouts with herbicide when they appear,” Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a [weekly Horticulture Newsletter](#) with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your [local K-State Research and Extension office](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
K-State Horticulture Newsletter, <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/index.html>

K-State Research and Extension local offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html>

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