



## Updates from the Trail: September 2023

### Plant spotlight: Poison Ivy Identification and Benefits

Poison Ivy. Two words that can make almost anyone grimace. If you have ever experienced a rash from this perennial plant, you understand that reaction (pun intended!). The plant itself is not technically poisonous, but the oil contained within it, called urushiol, can cause an allergic reaction in most people who encounter it. While poison ivy has a fearsome reputation due to the spreading rash it can cause, it isn't all bad.

After hearing several reports about how bad the poison ivy was this summer, we thought we would dive deeper (not literally) into poison ivy.

Native to Cape Cod, so it is everywhere, the key to avoiding this plant is being able to identify it.

- "Leaflets three, leave it be" – poison ivy produces compound leaves each with three leaflets, the center leaf usually the largest.
- The leaves are glossy on top. Colors can change from reddish green in spring, varying shades of green in summer, and red/orange/yellow in the fall.
- The stems are reddish and never have any thorns.
- Poison ivy leaves have pointed tips.



*Image of poison ivy from Eddy Bay trail. Notice the red stems and groups of three pointed leaves. Photo by Lissy Perna.*

One thing to remember is that poison ivy plants come in various sizes, from tiny sprouts to large bushes and even hairy vines that attach themselves to tree trunks and climb to the canopy.

But what good does this plant do?

Like ticks, mosquitos, and even pesky greenhead flies, this irritating plant is part of our ecosystem and plays an important role.

Firstly, the berries produced by this plant are a vitamin-rich food source for many birds and animals such as robins, rabbits, and white-tailed deer.

Another way that poison ivy benefits our environment is by protecting sand dunes. The long, reaching root system stabilizes the dunes on which they grow. Even the salty air and poor soil conditions don't seem to hinder the growth of this hardy plant, either.