

Expert offers tips for coping with poison ivy

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Virginia Tech's John Jelesko: "Don't let your fear of poison ivy prevent you from enjoying the outdoors. Learn to identify poison ivy. Then get outside and safely enjoy the natural world." Credit: Umar Mycka

Summer officially arrives at 6:07 a.m. on Thursday. And typically, the first two months of summer coincide with the height of poison ivy season.

Virginia Tech's John Jelesko researches [poison ivy](#) and the chemical contained in the plant – urushiol – and ways you can make sure it doesn't ruin your summer.

"In many ways this plant is the familiar stranger," he said, "We're all told 'leaves of three, let it be,' and that's all very sensible, but beyond that there is remarkably little specific scientific knowledge about poison ivy."

Jelesko, an associate professor of plant pathology, physiology, and weed science, offers the following tips:

- "If you suspect you've come in contact with poison ivy or poison oak, wash with soap and water within the first 10 minutes to hour after exposure. This can help prevent an outbreak in many people."
- "Even though dogs and cats are not allergic, they can easily transfer the oil to their owner. Always be careful about close contact with your pet after hiking past poison ivy."
- "If you have come in contact, you'll see a streaky, red rash in the first few days – especially if you've had a poison ivy reaction before. Most likely, you'll start breaking out in less than two days."
- "For those who are in the initial stages of becoming sensitized to

poison ivy, they may not show any dermatitis symptoms. But after several exposures, the full blown poison ivy rash can develop.

- "There are a wide variety of over-the-counter medications, home remedies and other cures. But if it gets really bad, you need to see a medical professional."
- "Don't let your fear of poison ivy prevent you from enjoying the outdoors. Learn to identify poison ivy. Then get outside and safely enjoy the natural world."

Jelesko adds that, amazingly, nearly 20 percent of the population leads a charmed life and seem to never develop an allergenic reaction to poison ivy and poison oak.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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