



Tailgate Safety Training for Landscaping and Horticultural Services

Agricultural Safety Program, 590 Woody Hayes Drive, Columbus, OH 43210

Skin Irritations Caused by Plants

Objective: Identify plants that can cause skin irritations and ways to avoid skin irritations.

How to Use This Module

Many plants can cause skin irritations, not just poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. For this module:

- Read the information below on types of skin irritations and ways to avoid them.
- Ask your supervisor and other workers to describe skin irritations they have experienced.
- Review the important points.
- Take the True/False quiz to check your learning.

Background

Many plants can cause skin irritations in humans. Some workers may be more sensitive to certain plants than other workers. Generally, there are five categories — poison plants, allergenic plants (and plant parts), skin irritant plants, stinging plants, and thorn plants.

- Poison plants include poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. They all contain a toxin called urushiol. This toxin is present in the sap of the plant. Touching this type of plant can cause skin rashes and blisters. See the Tailgate Safety Training module *Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, and Poison Sumac* for more detail.
- Allergenic plants (and plant parts) include, among others, orchids, tulip bulbs, chrysanthemums, and dahlias. They cause allergic reactions in some people. The pollen in these plants can cause hay fever or asthma.
- Skin irritant plants include, among others, poinsettias, pencil trees, daffodils, hyacinths, and buttercups. These plants can cause skin irritations.
- Stinging plants have nettles. Touching a nettle can cause a toxic reaction. However, the reaction does not last long and has no lasting effect.
- Thorn plants include, among others, roses, blackberry and raspberry bushes, and black locust and honey locust trees. Infection can result from an embedded thorn. A scratch can also cause an infection especially if dirt gets into the scratch. See the Tailgate Safety Training module *Thorn Bushes* for more detail.

How to Avoid Skin Irritations

- If you handle plants, wear gloves, a long-sleeve shirt, and long pants. Wear work shoes or boots. Do not wear open-toed shoes or sandals.
- Never burn plants that may be toxic. Toxins can be present in the smoke.
- Learn what problem plants grow in your area and how to identify them.
- If you touch a poisonous plant, obtain treatment immediately. See the Tailgate Safety Training module *Poison Ivy, Poison, Sumac, and Poison Oak* for more detail.
- Never eat wild berries or plant leaves.
- After handling plants, always wash your hands and other exposed skin before eating, drinking, smoking, or going to the bathroom.
- Wash your clothes separately in hot water. Clean your shoes with rubbing alcohol and water.
- If you have a severe reaction to a plant, such as a rash or blisters, see a doctor.

Review These Important Points

- Learn to recognize what problem plants look like, such as dahlias, hyacinths, daffodils, and blackberry bushes.
- Wear proper clothing to lessen the chance of plants touching your skin.
- Always wash your clothing separately in hot water.
- Never eat wild berries or plant leaves.
- Never burn plants that may be toxic. Toxins can be present in the smoke.
- Obtain treatment immediately if you develop a rash or blisters.

About These Modules

The author team for the training modules in the landscape and horticultural tailgate training series includes Dee Jepsen, Program Director, Agricultural Safety and Health, Ohio State University Extension; Michael Wonacott, Research Specialist, Vocational Education; Peter Ling, Greenhouse Specialist; and Thomas Bean, Agricultural Safety Specialist. Modules were developed with funding from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, Grant Number 46E3-HT09.

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Answer Key: 1 = F, 2 = T, 3 = T, 4 = F, 5 = F.

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Name _____

True or False?

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Wash your shoes separately in hot water after handling plants. | T | F |
| 2. Burning plants can release harmful toxins into the air. | T | F |
| 3. After handling plants, always wash your hands and other exposed skin before eating, drinking, smoking, or going to the bathroom. | T | F |
| 4. Eating wild berries is okay if they look ripe. | T | F |
| 5. Wear short-sleeved shirts so you can spot skin reactions easily. | T | F |