

Poisonous/ Harmful Plants of the PNW

General Guidelines:

- Do not eat any red or green berries.
- Do not eat ANY mushrooms, unless you are a mycologist and have a degree, or have foraged in the wild for over 40 years.
- Don't eat flowers. They're almost all toxic to humans.
- If you see a plant with leaves that occur in a cluster of three, stay far, far away.

Please Note: This is not an extensive list by any means. Please use some common sense while camping, backpacking, hiking etc. Many edible plants have toxic lookalikes, and unless you are absolutely positive (and maybe not even then), don't eat it.

Poison Oak

Poison oak, which is the West Coast version of poison ivy, causes rashes and itching and is, unfortunately, common in most of the PNW.

Identification: Poison oak grows close to the ground and has leaves that occur in threes with scalloped edges. In the fall the leaves turn bright red, making it a bit easier to identify. During the summer, they are a dark, waxy green color. The rhyme "Leaves of three, let them be" may help you to remember that this plant is not to be messed with.



Symptoms: Depending on the sensitivity of the person, skin rashes will appear anywhere from immediately after coming in contact with the plant to 48 hours after having touched the plant.

Treatment: Changing clothes and bathing or rinsing the area with large amounts of cool water will help remove the poison from the skin. Be sure to wrap the clothes in a plastic bag to wash once you get home. Calamine lotion or a paste made of baking soda and water can help with the itching, but nothing but time will actually cure the rash.



Stinging Nettle

Stinging nettle, while irritating, is not actually that toxic, though it is quite common.

Identification: The plant is usually 3-4 feet high with leaves that have toothed edges. The underside of these leaves and the stem of the plant are covered with tiny needles, which is what causes irritation.

Symptoms: Burning sensation on contact, with red skin.

Treatment: Cool water may help, but really the only thing to do is wait it out. Aspirin can be taken if necessary.

Deadly Nightshade

This plant also goes by the name of belladonna, and is not native to the area but can often be found here.

Identification: The plant seems inviting with tiny purple and yellow flowers, and later in summer red, oblong berries, but don't be fooled. It usually grows in shady areas and has a distinctly bad odor.

Symptoms: Very poisonous if ingested. Increased heartbeat and, in severe cases, paralysis occur.



Treatment: Since it is unlikely people will actually eat the berries due to the smell, treatment usually isn't the issue. The problem comes from touching the plant, which leaves a poisonous residue on the hands, and then touching your face or eating something after contact. If you fear you have come in contact with nightshade, wash your hands immediately. If you fear you've been poisoned, do not force vomiting, drink plenty of water, wash hands thoroughly with soap, and seek medical assistance.



Mushrooms

There are many varieties of mushrooms in the PNW, some edible, some not. A good general rule is just don't eat any of them unless you are a mycologist, which is just the fancy term for mushroom expert.

Identification: There is no foolproof rule to distinguish edible mushrooms from poisonous ones. So please don't try.

Symptoms: mild to severe upset stomach, nausea, and for the more poisonous varieties, convulsions or even paralysis.

Treatment: If eaten, drink water, rinse out mouth, and do not force vomiting. Wash any part of the body that may have come in contact with the mushroom. Collect a sample of the mushroom if possible. Call your local poison control center and seek medical attention.

Western Poison Ivy

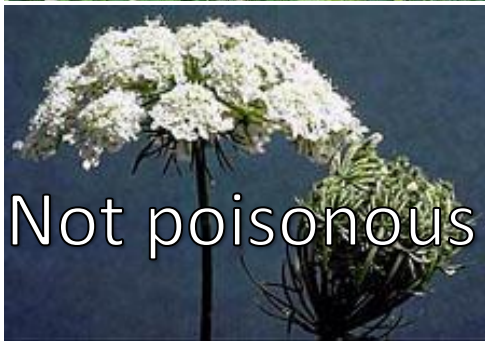
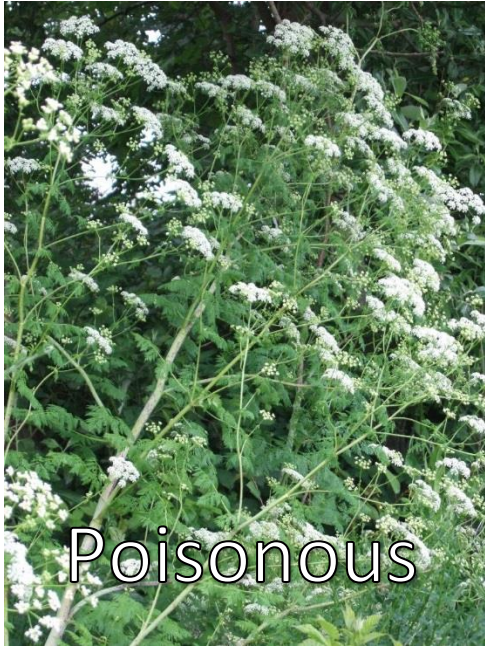
Western poison ivy, which also grows in the eastern states of the US, is less common here on in the western states than poison ivy is on the east side. But it still occurs here, so take note.

Identification: Again, "Leaves of three, let it be". To the right is a picture of western poison ivy both with and without berries. The berries, while edible for birds, are toxic to humans and the plant causes the same rash as regular poison ivy or poison oak.



Symptoms: Skin rash

Treatment: Changing clothes and bathing or rinsing the area with large amounts of cool water will help remove the poison from the skin. Be sure to wrap the clothes in a plastic bag to wash once you get home. Calamine lotion or a paste made of baking soda and water can help with the itching, but nothing but time will actually cure the rash.



Poison Hemlock

Poison hemlock is an invasive species, and in Washington State it is listed as a class B noxious weed. It is highly poisonous if ingested. This is the same infamous plant that was given to Socrates in ancient Greece to kill him.

Identification: Poison hemlock is often confused for wild carrot (other name: Queen Anne's lace), and a plethora of other plants, both edible and not, which is part of what makes it so dangerous. This plant is tall (growing up to 12 feet high) with clusters of small, white flowers that occur in umbrella shaped clusters.

Symptoms: Dilation of the pupils, dizziness, and trembling followed by slowing of the heartbeat, paralysis of the central nervous system, muscle paralysis, and death due to respiratory failure.

Treatment: Seek immediate medical attention and call 1-(800)-222-1222- American Association of Poison Control Centers.

References:

Poisonous plants of Oregon: http://www.troop245.org/ref/poison_plants_or.html

General information on hikes in Oregon, but also info on plants (this page poison oak):

http://www.oregonhikers.org/field_guide/Poison_Oak

Edible/poisonous mushroom lookalikes: <http://www.mnn.com/your-home/organic-farming-gardening/stories/wild-mushrooms-what-to-eat-what-to-avoid>

Western Poison Ivy: <http://www.poison-ivy.org/western-poison-ivy>

Poisonous Hemlock in Washington: <http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/detail.asp?weed=38>

List of poisonous plants in Washington: <http://sccd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Poisonous-Plants-of-WA-State.pdf>

Parasites in the PNW

General Guidelines:

- Always treat any and all drinking water, or drink filtered or bottled water.
- When swimming in lakes, rivers, streams, or ponds, avoid ingesting water.
- Wash all food before consuming, and preferably cook the food too.
- Remember that although ticks are creepy, they usually do not spread diseases. Take precautions, remove them as soon as possible, and see a doctor if you become sick within 1 month.



Ticks

Ticks are small blood-sucking parasites that carry diseases and pass them along to their victims. Think like small, land leeches. But worse. They perch on the edges of vegetation (trees, branches, tall grasses etc.) and attach to animals and people as they walk by.

Diseases that ticks commonly carry:

Lyme disease- While the most common disease spread by ticks nationwide, Lyme disease is rare in Washington state. The first sign of Lyme disease is usually an expanding circular rash (see photo on right) which starts at the site of the tick bite. The rash may have a target shape or "bull's-eye" appearance. Fever, headache, muscle aches, and joint pain may also occur. If left untreated, later symptoms can include recurring joint pain, heart disease, and nervous system disorders.



Tick-borne Relapsing Fever- This disease is caused by ticks that feed on rodents, pick up the fever causing bacteria, then feed on humans and pass it along. Since these ticks are associated with rodent burrows and nests, it's important to keep rodents out of cabins and other sleeping areas. Symptoms include relapsing (recurrent) periods of fever lasting for two to seven days, disappearing for about four to fourteen days, and then reoccurring.



Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever- Like Lyme disease and Tick-borne relapsing fever, this disease is rare in Washington. Initial symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever may include fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite, and severe headache. A rash generally, but not always, appears a few days later. Abdominal pain, joint pain, and diarrhea can also occur. The ticks that cause this disease, American dog ticks, are found throughout the state and prefer woodland areas, medium height grasses and shrubs between wetlands and woods, and sunny or open areas around woods. They are especially common in eastern Washington.

Other disease are even less common than the ones mentioned above, and information can be found in the “References” section.

Prevention:

Wearing pants and long sleeves, tucking pants into socks/ boots and shirts into pants, wearing light colored clothing with tight weaves, and using tick repellent are all good precautions to follow to avoid getting bit. Also, after being out and about in tick habitat, check yourself and others for any signs of ticks. Sometimes people dismiss ticks as freckles or dirt spots.

Removing a tick:

Remove the tick by grasping it as close to the skin surface as possible with fine tipped tweezers and pulling upward with steady pressure. Do not twist or jerk, as this could cause the mouthparts to remain in the skin. Do not use folk remedies, such as hot matches or nail polish, to remove ticks. Note the day you were bitten, and if you become ill in the next month be sure to tell your doctor that you were bitten by a tick.



Fleas

Giardia (and other common parasites)

Giardia is a microscopic protozoan parasite that can infect not just animals, but humans too. The most common source of infection is from contaminated water sources. Water sources that may have come in contact with infected animal feces are often to blame for human infections.

Symptoms: Vomiting and diarrhea.

Treatment: Seek medical attention. Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

Prevention: Treat all drinking water. Avoid drinking water in lakes, ponds, streams, or rivers where you are swimming. Cook all meat thoroughly, and wash vegetables and fruit before consuming.

References:

Giardia info: <http://www.pilchuckvet.com/articles/veterinary-q-a-other-pests-and-parasites-pet-owners-should-be-aware-of>

Hiking in Tick Country: <http://www.wta.org/signpost/hiking-in-tick-country>

Ticks in Washington state: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Pests/Ticks>

Another parasite: http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/gen_info/infect.html