

Horticulture

Seasonal Needle Drop on Evergreens

Contrary to popular belief, evergreens do not keep their needles indefinitely. Older, inner needles, discolor and drop off after one to several years, depending on the evergreen in question.

Sometimes the drop occurs slowly. On other occasions, many needles may turn yellow all at once in late summer or fall. Because weather triggers the condition, many evergreens are likely to show symptoms in the fall. If you are not familiar with this natural process, it could cause you a great deal of concern.

Each species of evergreens usually keeps its needles for a definite length of time. White pines are the most dramatically affected. They usually keep three years of needles in summer and two in winter. The three-year old

white pine needles turn yellow throughout the tree in fall. The tree will appear particularly unhealthy when these yellow needles outnumber the green ones. Austrian and Scotch pine also keep their needles for three years and Norway pine keep theirs for four years. Needles on arborvitae, usually turn brown rather than yellow when they age. They often remain attached much longer than mature pine needles. Japanese yew needles turn yellow and drop in late spring or early summer of their third year. Spruce and fir needles also yellow and drop with age. These evergreens retain needles for several years, so you may not see needle drop unless you look closely on inner branches. These needle drop patterns vary from tree to tree and from year to year. (MJF)

Horticulture information center

NUFACTS
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
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Poison Ivy

Anyone who has ever experienced the blisters, swelling, and extreme itching from an unfortunate encounter with poison ivy, learns quickly to avoid it whenever possible. It grows in non-cultivated sites, such as along stream banks, roadways, railroad tracks, fence rows, and woodlands. It can even make an appearance in your ornamental shrub or perennial borders. Therefore, knowing how to identify and control it are the best defenses against accidental contact.

The best way to identify poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*) is by its characteristic compound leaf consisting of three leaflets. The leaflets are two to four inches long, dull or glossy green with pointed tips. The middle leaflet is generally larger than the two laterals. The margins of the leaflets are variable, appearing irregularly toothed, lobed, or smooth. The leaves are positioned alternately on the stems. In contrast, Virginia Creeper, a non-poisonous vine often mistaken for poison ivy, has five leaflets radiating from one point of attachment.

Poison ivy can be found in one of three forms; as an upright woody shrub, a trailing shrub running along the ground, or a woody vine. The vine is usually seen growing on trees or other objects for support. Yellowish-green flowers occur in compact clusters in leaf axils, and are produced in June or July. The waxy, berry-like fruit is grayish-white, with distinct lines marking the outer surface and is about three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter.

There are three methods that can be effective in eradicating poison ivy in ornamental beds. They include hand pulling or grubbing; severing the vine and then treating the regrowth with an herbicide; or applying an herbicide to individual leaflets.

Hand pulling is most successful when the soil is moist. The roots can be dug and pulled out in long pieces. Care should be taken to remove the entire root because the plant can resprout from sections of root left in the ground. Avoid skin contact by wearing gloves while you work and washing clothing and gloves immediately after. The washing machine should be rinsed thoroughly afterward to eliminate the possibility of contaminating other clothing.

Vines growing on trees can be difficult to pull out of the



"Leaves of three – let it be:" poison ivy's identifying characteristic is its compound leaves consisting of three leaflets.

ground because their roots may be entangled with the tree's roots. Sever the vine at the base and carefully pull it out of the tree. Glyphosate (Roundup or Kleenup Grass & Weed Killer), a non-selective, translocated herbicide, can be applied to the new shoots that will soon emerge from the base of the old plant. This herbicide is most effective if applied to actively growing foliage. Poison ivy is difficult to control even with herbicides. You may not receive complete control from a single application and repeat applications to treat regrowth may be necessary. Other herbicide brands or formulations may be found at your local garden center. Be sure to read the label to ensure that poison ivy is listed on the label, then follow the manufacturer's directions.

When poison ivy is found in the midst of your prized ornamental plants, special care should be taken to eliminate it. Paint the individual leaflets with a non-selective herbicide like glyphosate to avoid harming desirable plants.

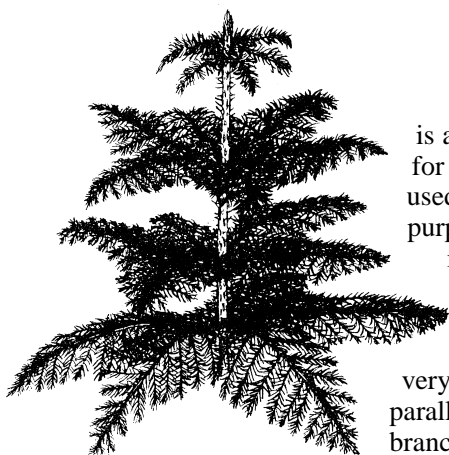
The blistering rash caused by poison ivy is the direct result of contact with the oily toxicant, known as urushiol. Urushiol is found in resin ducts within the plant's phloem. These ducts are found throughout the plant, including the roots, stems, bark, leaflets and certain flower parts. The plant has to be crushed, broken, or in some way injured

to release the resin.

Once urushiol is released, it can find its way to your skin by direct contact with the plant and then spread by touching other parts of the body. Because the sticky, oily substance is easily transmitted, there are indirect ways to contact it, for instance, from the fur of the family pet, garden tools, garden gloves, clothing, golf balls or other objects that have come in contact with an injured plant. Contrary to popular belief, the rash from poison ivy cannot be transmitted from touching the oozing blisters.

If you know you have contacted poison ivy, wash the area as soon as possible with soap and cool water. Warm water may cause the resin to penetrate the skin faster. Because urushiol can penetrate in a matter of minutes, you may still get a rash, but at least you have contained the infected area. A visible reaction, redness and swelling may be apparent within 12 to 24 hours. Contact your family physician or pharmacist for recommendations for effective non-prescription medication.

One additional caution is that people can contract a rash by exposure to smoke of burning poison ivy; be careful not to burn wood with the poison ivy vine attached to it. Take extreme caution to avoid inhaling smoke or contact of smoke with skin and clothing. (MJF)



Norfolk Island Pine

The Norfolk Island pine is an evergreen plant suitable for a houseplant. It can be used in a variety of decorative purposes. In its native habitat, it can grow to a height of 220 feet with a trunk up to 10 feet in diameter.

As a small plant, it is very uniform with branches parallel to the ground. These branches have rows of soft,

bright green, half inch long needles that taper to a fine point.

The Norfolk Island pine is a long lasting houseplant that grows 3 to 6 inches a year. A large Norfolk Island pine makes an excellent display in entrance halls or foyers, and presents a good first impression of the home or office. Smaller plants are handsome attractions for coffee tables, desks, and end

tables. Norfolk Island pines grow well in indirect sunlight. Night temperatures of 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit and day temperatures of 68 to 72 degrees are optimal for plant growth. However, the Norfolk Island pine will tolerate temperatures between 45 and 85 degrees.

The soil should be kept only lightly moistened. This plant does not require as much water

as most common houseplants. It cannot tolerate soggy or saturated soil. Norfolk Island pines do not require frequent fertilization. Use any complete houseplant fertilizer and follow the manufacturer's recommendations. These pines need to be repotted every three to four years to allow for growth. (MJF)