

5 PLANTS THAT SHOULD NEVER TOUCH YOUR SKIN



Plants are incredibly smart; a lot smarter than we give them credit for.

As humans, we are created with a genetic predisposition to protect ourselves. When we sense danger, our bodies release epinephrine in order to initiate a fight-or-flight response. Though plants don't have epinephrine (of course), they do have built-in chemical weapons that keep them safe, and keep predators away - both animals and humans.

So what does that have to do with you? **Well...these chemicals can be extremely deadly, especially if you're exposed to them on your morning walks in nature.** They can lead to blistering skin and **rashes**, burning, stinging, and other '*discomforts*' that could ultimately lead to a trip to the hospital. So it's extremely important not to expose your skin to plants.

KNOW YOUR PLANTS:

To protect your skin and minimize your exposure, it's very important to know which plants are harmful, and which plants are safe. Some plants deemed safe can *also* cause nasty side-effects if you are over-exposed.

So, here are 5 commonly encountered plants in North America that you should look out for. *You can also download this blog and keep it on your phone in case you need to reference it when you're out and about!*

- Water Hemlock



The water Hemlock is a toxic wetland plant that is commonly found in wet meadows along the banks of streams. It's arguably one of the most poisonous plants in North America, and can lead to seizures and death.

The toxic substance in water hemlock is **cicutoxin**, a highly poisonous unsaturated alcohol that has a **strong carrot-like odor**. It is found principally in the tubers but is also present in the leaves and stems during early growth.



- Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweeds were not indigineous in Canada, however it has recently been spotted across several provinces such as Ontario, B.C., and Quebec. It's also very common in the U.S.

These plants can grow up to 2 meters in height, and look like a gigantic version of the Queen Anne's lace (which is lovely, but...Giant Hogweeds scare me!!)

Though this plant isn't deadly, the sap can cause burning and blistering. And, if it makes contact with the eyes it can cause temporary or permanent blindness, so stay clear!

- Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, Poison Sumac



The deadly trio is what I like to call these 3 sister plants, and the easiest way to identify them is through their distinctive leaf shapes as well as black spots typically found on their leaves. All three of these plants emit an oil called urushiol. This oil is the toxin that makes you itch. The oil is present on the leaves, stems, and roots of these plants whether they are live or dried up. It's important to note that you should NEVER burn these plants, especially if you find them growing in your backyard. If they're burned, the oil vaporizes and is carried in the smoke. Breathing the fumes can threaten the lives of some individuals.

Poison Ivy



Poison Oak



Poison Sumac

WHAT TO DO IF YOU COME INTO CONTACT WITH THESE PLANTS

According to the **United States Department of Agriculture and Forest Service** this is what you should do if your skin comes in contact with one of these plants.

In cases of water hemlock poisoning, contact a poison control center and obtain emergency medical assistance as quickly as possible...

In the case of the other 4 plants, you should wash the area with cold water as soon as possible. If symptoms appear (inflammation and a rash), apply topical ointments, such as calamine lotion or zinc oxide, for relief from itching.

So, if you are out and enjoying nature ensure that you respect nature and try to learn as much as you can about what is around you...and when in doubt...don't touch it!