
UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

Poison Ivy



Question: How can I control poison ivy without using chemical herbicides?

Answer: Controlling poison ivy is difficult, and it may more than a year to see satisfactory results. One way to get rid of it is by constantly mowing or cutting young shoots. Over time mowing will exhaust the roots and the plants will die (this can take several years). Another method is to dig up the plant, roots and all. Bag and dispose of plants because roots left on the soil surface may resprout. Cover all exposed skin, and put your clothes through a hot wash as soon as you are finished. An easier method might be to mow and then cover what's left with black plastic, pinned tightly to the ground, for an entire growing season. Another option is to let goats or sheep feed on your poison ivy. This can keep plants from getting too big. One way to manage the grazing is to rotate livestock to other pasture areas once the target plants have been eaten, and then reintroduce the livestock when vegetation reappears.

You might also try an organic herbicide. These are available at many garden centers. These generally "burn down" the leaves, but won't kill the whole plant. Repeated treatments will be necessary to use up the energy reserves in the roots as leaves reappear. Burning poison ivy is not recommended. When burned, the oils in poison ivy are released in the smoke and can produce an allergic reaction in the eyes, throat, lungs and skin.

If you know you have come in contact with poison ivy and can bathe immediately using technu or Fels Naptha to remove the oil from your skin, you may avoid a rash. If not, you'll need to resort to standard topical remedies.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center's Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu