POISON OAK IN THE ARROYO SECO

Leaves of Three, Let Them Be

Poison oak occurs naturally in the Arroyo Seco and is an important part of the local ecology. While this plant provides refuge to many Arroyo mammals and birds, coming into contact with oils from the plant will give most people an allergic skin rash. This applies to contact with any part of the plant-leaves, stems, flowers, berries, or roots. It is even possible to develop a reaction from your clothing that touches poison oak or by petting your dog after the animal contacts the plant (though the dog will not get the rash.)

Avoid contact with the plant during any season but plants are particularly tender, and more likely to expose you to oils, in the spring and early summer.



Being able to identify the plant will help you avoid contact. The plants typically grow in damp, shady areas near running water but can also thrive in full sun.

Identifying poison oak can be a challenge as the plant can appear in many forms (shrub, tree, or vine), and the leaves change color and character with the season. Leaves are divided into three leaflets-hence the common saying "leaves of three, let them be". These leaves generally resemble the lobed character of a true oak leaf, but are glossier. When leaves first appear early in the year, they are bronze. In spring leaves are bright green, yellow-green or reddish in the summer, and bright red or pinkish in the fall. In the winter, poison oak looses its leaves. White or tan berries or the appearance of black marks where milky sap has oozed may help identify the leafless plant in winter.



Berries Photo Credit: Noah Elhardt

Green to Red Phase Photo Credit: Joe Decruyenaere



Leonard G.



Bronze Phase Photo Credit: Gregg Erikson



Young Leaf Photo credit: na

