Plants and Insects

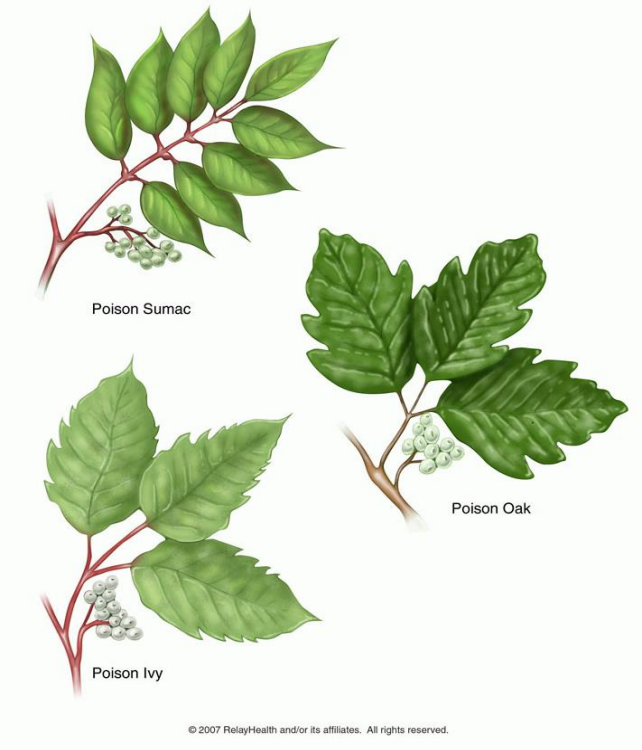
This section discusses the different types of poisonous plants and harmful insects.

Plants

The best protection from poisonous plants such as poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac is recognition, avoidance and covering all exposed body parts. (i.e. long sleeved shirts, gloves)

The figure below shows these common poisonous plants.

Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac take on different forms in different places. The leaflets may vary from groups of three to groups of five, seven, or even nine leaves. It is best to learn what these poisonous plants look like where you live.



The oil of these poison plants, called urushiol [oo-roo-shee-awl], is a sticky substance that stays active a long time. It can be easily transferred to your skin by touching your clothing, from a pet, or even from burning poison ivy leaves. Just covering up against poison ivy with clothing and gloves is not enough but does help to avoid direct contact. If exposure does occur, the first step is to apply rubbing alcohol to the affected skin and wash with soap and water. If a rash/itch develops, apply calamine lotion and consult a physician as needed.

Insects

Another hazard encountered in the field is insects. There are two categories of insect bites/stings: venomous and non-venomous. The table below identifies the types of insects in each category.

Biting/Stinging Insects	
Venomous	**Nonvenomous**
Wasp Hornet Yellow Jacket All Bees Fire Ants	Chiggers Fleas Lice Scabies Bed Bugs Ticks Mosquitoes

Venomous insects attack in defense. These insects inject painful, toxic venom through a stinger. Venomous stings are always painful, red, and swollen. This type of reaction is called a local reaction. In sensitive individuals, a more severe whole body reaction may occur. Allergic reactions, such as hives and swelling away from the sting site, are called systemic reactions. These systemic reactions can become life threatening if they involve the airways or circulation systems.

Nonvenomous insects bite and usually inject anticoagulant saliva in order to feed on your blood. Some local reactions occur due to insect bites, such as itching and swelling, but generally insect bites are not dangerous. It is extremely rare to suffer an allergic reaction to insect bites. Insects can spread diseases like Lyme disease, encephalitis, and malaria through their bites. However, this also is extremely rare, and most bites will result in only local reaction.

There are two methods for preventing insect bites and stings: repellents and avoidance. Insect repellents work well for biting insects but are not very effective against stinging insects. The most effective insect repellent ingredient available is DEET, which is available in most sprays and lotions. There are no proven effective insect repellent products that may be taken orally.

The table below summarizes some techniques to avoid stinging and biting insects:

Insect Avoidance Techniques	
Stinging Insects	**Mosquitos, Chiggers and Ticks**
• Don't wear cologne, perfume or scented lotions. • Control odors at picnics, garbage areas. etc. • Avoid brightly colored clothing outdoors. • Destroy or relocate all known hives or nests near your home.	• Cover as much of your skin as possible with clothing, hats, socks etc. • Pay special attention to cuff areas at ankles, wrists and neck. • Avoid swamps or standing water. • Examine exposed skin and scale areas for clinging ticks. • Use insect repellent.