**POISON OAK!**

Poison oak and its eastern counterpart poison ivy are two of the most notoriously painful plants in North America. Each year thousands of people are afflicted with moderate to severe dermatitis from touching the foliage of these plants. Poison oak and poison ivy account for an estimated ten percent of lost work time in the U. S. Forest Service. In fact, hundreds of fire fighters who battle summer and fall blazes in California’s coastal ranges are so severely affected that they are unable to work. Because of the serious economic impact due to lost employment time, poison oak "injuries" are covered by Workers' Compensation Insurance in California.

Poison oak is one of the most common shrubs in Southern California and can be found throughout much of Los Angeles County. It prefers shaded areas and is frequently found on north facing slopes of hillsides and canyons. It grows in greatest densities where established vegetation has been disturbed by cultivation, construction, road building, or wildfires.

Poison oak grows as a multi-stemmed shrub or woody vine. Shrubs are erect with stems from 2 to 6 feet tall. Vines usually have three, round to ovate, diversely lobed or toothed leaflets. The leaves are reddish when they emerge in the spring, turn green during the summer, and become various shades of yellow, orange or red in the autumn. Poison Oak is harder to identify in the winter, when it loses its leaves and looks like erect sticks coming from the ground.

**Figure 1:** Poison oak rash.

**Figure 2:** Poison oak plants in the spring (left) and fall (right).

Sources:
2. [http://waynesword.palomar.edu](http://waynesword.palomar.edu)