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POISON OAK ERADICATION BY THE CAN METHOD

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Individual poison oak plants can now be eradicated under certain conditions at a low cost. A poisonous solution applied to the top growth is carried downward through the roots and destroys them. This method is limited to small areas or scattered individual plants growing in shrubbery, flower beds, yards and gardens and near trees.

TREATING DIRECTIONS FOR SINGLE PLANTS.

The most effective chemicals used are solutions of sodium arsenite, "pentox" and borax. Mix one part of chemical to 60 or 70 parts of water. Make sure that all of the chemical goes into solution and that the solution is thoroughly mixed.

Treatment should be made at a time when the soil is low in moisture and the plants are needing water. In most years this condition will be found from mid to late summer and until the fall rains have started. If the moisture requirement of the plant is being well supplied by the roots, the treatment will fail because sufficient downward movement of water from the tops cannot take place to make the treatment effective.

Part of a branch of the plant is bent over and securely fastened in a can or other container. When handling the branch, care should be taken not to break the stems and thus disconnect the tissues which conduct the solution throughout the plant system.

Fill the can or container that holds the plant with the solution. Best results are obtained if there is an excess of this solution for each treatment. The containers should, therefore, be from one quart to one gallon in size, depending on the size of the plant. The foliage that comes in contact with the solution is rendered permeable by the chemical and the solution is drawn into the root system until the water deficiency of the plant is satisfied. A rapid movement of this poison solution is necessary for the best results.

When properly applied, the chemical will be drawn for great depth into the root system. Tests with certain dyes have shown that solutions can be carried into the roots for several feet. In some cases where the eosin red dye was applied to the tops by the method given above, the dye was traced for approximately 20 feet in the roots. The roots of poison oak go deep into the soil, but the root systems are not interconnected. In other words, each plant has its own root system. Consequently treating of one plant has no effect on adjoining plants.

Where small plants are treated by this method it is sufficient to place the tip of one stem or branch in the container that holds the solution. Where large plants are treated it is necessary to use two or more cans spaced equally around the plant. The circulatory system of plants is such that certain branches or portions of the top growth are largely independent of other portions. Solution that moves down one side of a large plant does not come in direct contact with the opposite side of the plant. Consequently if large plants are treated in the manner outlined the poisonous solution will not reach all parts of the root system if only one small twig or branch is in contact with the solution. Therefore one part or side of the plant could be killed and the other side remain alive.

Because of the nature of the treatment, one can readily see that it is applicable only to the eradication of scattered plants and not to heavy infestations. Therefore, this treatment can only be considered for scattered plants as previously mentioned.

TREATING DIRECTIONS FOR LARGE PATCHES

For larger patches of poison oak it is necessary to treat with sodium chlorate, a standard weed killing chemical. Use three to four pounds of chlorate to the square rod. This should be applied in March or early April. The chlorate is taken into the soil by rains that follow application. It is, therefore, essential that applications be made at the proper time while there is moisture enough to dissolve it and take it into the soil and after the period of heavy rains that might carry it out in drainage water. Applications of the chemical can be made either in a solution or put on dry, but care must be taken to get an even and thorough distribution around the plants. Chlorate kills not only poison oak and weeds but will also kill lawn grasses as well as most other plants and shrubs. Therefore, it must not be applied near other plants or where drainage or seepage water will carry it to the roots of other plants.

CAUTION

When using sodium arsenite and "pentox" which is a commercial preparation containing arsenic, it is necessary to exercise a great deal of care as they are both poisonous. Children and livestock, or small animals of any kind, should be kept away from treated areas or the solution. "Pentox" also contains sulfuric acid and would have a severe burning effect if it got on the skin, particularly in open sores. The results to date show that the most effective of the three chemicals mentioned are sodium arsenite and pentox. However, they are only slightly more effective than borax, and where there is danger of poisoning it would probably be better to use the borax. Sodium arsenite and borax are the cheapest chemicals used and they can be obtained from most any of the large drug firms or companies that handle spray materials.

Most people are susceptible to the poisonous properties of poison oak and anyone treating plants by this method should have a solution of ammonia water or a strong solution of soda water handy. Thorough rinsing of the hands and face with these solutions immediately after treating plants will often counteract the irritating action of the poison oak.
