

Plants are aesthetically pleasing and bring freshness to the air because they act as natural air purifiers. They enhance the aura of your home, creating a cosy vibe. At the same time, they have been shown to improve people's health; it seems just being around greenery is good for you. But, as wonderful as it is to fill your home with succulents and orchids, plants can cause skin problems and rashes too. Poison ivy is not the only plant that can give you an intense reaction. Here are a few tips on how to identify and treat a plant-based rash.

>> Be careful when handling plants that have spines or thorns



### UNDERSTANDING PLANT RASHES

We all know about and fear plants such as poison ivy, poison oak and sumac for the dangers they pose to our skin and health. But, other plants such as cactus and prickly pear, figs, mulberries, thistles and saw palmetto are known to cause skin reactions too. What's more, many plant-related rashes are caused by plants that contain spines, thorns or small barbed protrusions called glochids.

A majority of plant rashes are harmless, causing mild reactions that can be resolved without seeking medical aid, but some plants can cause severe reactions that require medical attention and proper care.

Dr. Manjiri Puranik, cosmetic physician at InstaSculpt, says, "If plant spines get under your skin, they can cause itchy, bumpy eruptions. The rash is typically innocuous, but you can develop a staph or fungal infection if microbes are present on the prickly spine that enters the skin."

If you accidentally brush up against stinging nettle plants, you could break out into hives. The stems and leaves have sharp hair resembling hypodermic needles. When these hair come in contact with your skin, the chemical histamine is released, causing hives within 30 to 60 minutes of exposure. Plants with thorns such as roses can cause trauma and lacerations of the skin (mechanical injury) if they accidentally rub against the skin. Some plants produce allergens that are airborne and can cause skin allergies.

### IDENTIFYING THE RASH

Dr. Vandana Punjabi, dermatologist and cosmetologist consultant at Nanavati Hospital, tells us how to identify a plant-based rash. She says, "Itchy red rashes and possibly blisters can occur on the areas where the thorns or plant has been in contact with the skin. If the juice or sap of the plant has touched the skin, a rash arranged in the form of streaks will appear on the affected area. As the skin heals, the injury may become darker than usual; these darkened areas may take weeks or months to fade."

Coming in direct contact with plants is not the only way of being infected; airborne contact is possible and can cause a reaction too. This is essentially the case with poison ivy. Dr. Manjiri states that when a poison ivy plant is injured in any way, the particles of a

>> A majority of plant rashes can be resolved without medical intervention

sap called urushiol are released into the air, which when inhaled can cause a widespread rash and severe irritation in the respiratory tract. This rash presents similarly to the others with itchy red patches and blisters, but surfaces up to four days after exposure.

### TREATMENTS & CURES

Dr. Geeta Fazalbhoy, dermatologist and founder of Skin & You Clinic, says, "A rash which develops from coming in contact with plant-based materials is an allergic reaction and needs treatment. The best course of action is to wash the resin out, avoid contact with the plant and treat it with medical guidance to avoid further pigmentation."

The treatment for a plant-based rash depends on the type of the rash and the plant

# HAZARDOUS GARDENING

Prickly skin, red patches and pigmentation may cause obstacles in your love for tending to plants. **Aakriti Patni** tells you how to identify and treat plant-based infections



that causes it. Dermatologist at Dr. L H Hiranandani Hospital, Dr. Ashvith Shetty shares tips on treating a plant-based rash. "If the rash is caused by contact with thorns, the thorn should be carefully removed from the skin, preferably with forceps. In the case of contact with poison ivy, the skin should be immediately rinsed with water. General treatment for itching, irritation or rash includes taking oral antihistamine, and applying calamine lotion and a steroid antibiotic cream," he says.

Keep an eye on the infected area for signs of discharge, swelling and pus. If irritation and itching persists, seek medical attention.



>> Identify the cause in order to treat the rash effectively

### PROTECT YOURSELF



- Wear protective clothing, exposing as little skin as possible when gardening.
- If you're going to take part in outdoor activities such as camping, wear gloves (preferably vinyl gloves), long sleeves and long pants tucked into socks.
- Protect your skin by applying barrier cream or lotion to exposed skin before going outdoors.
- Avoid touching your face and eyes when working with outdoor plants.
- If your skin comes in contact with plant material, juice or sap, wash it off quickly with plenty of water.
- Apply an over-the-counter barrier cream or lotion containing Quaternium-18-Bentonite to exposed skin.
- Be careful about which types of plants you handle.