



TOXIC PLANTS

Identification and Exposure Prevention

Environmental Message May 2026

Did you know? There are plants on the ROW that cause reactions much more severe than an itchy rash. Some plants, like poison hemlock, contain toxic alkaloids that can paralyze muscles and shut down the nervous system. It can cause respiratory paralysis if ingested, with even small amounts being fatal. Other plants, like giant hogweed and wild parsnip, cause photosensitivity, which means that if skin is exposed to their sap, and then sunlight, it results in severe blisters, burns, and even blindness.



Parsley Family: The parsley (*Apiaceae*) plant family includes several plants commonly found in the ROW that can pose serious health risks if handled without proper identification. Key features of these plants include: umbrella-shaped flower clusters (umbels), hollow or grooved stems, feathery or fern-like leaves, and a strong celery-like odor when crushed. Plants in the parsley family can vary in size and color, but these shared traits help distinguish them from look-alikes.

Staying Safe: Consistently practice accurate plant identification and review species profiles before entering new areas. Always wear appropriate PPE, including gloves, long sleeves, eye protection, and chemical-resistant clothing, to reduce the risk of skin contact with toxic sap. If you do come into contact with a suspect plant, wash the exposed areas immediately with soap and water and stay out of the sunlight to prevent reactions. Never burn toxic brush, as the smoke can carry harmful compounds that may cause severe respiratory or skin injuries. Taking these precautions greatly reduces the risk of accidental exposure.



References / Works Cited

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