

Stem Identification

From November to February many stems are bare. They are hard to see without their leaves. Since they release poison if bruised or broken, it is important to identify them.



Figure 6. Dried roots are very characteristic of poison-oak.



Figure 7. Bends like these are characteristic. They are called elbows.

Often side branches grow sideways several feet and then curve upward.



Figure 8. Poison-oak grows through other plants to get to the light.

In full sun the tip of a stem is shorter and the side branches longer than in Figure 5. On trees stem structure is a vine. Where there is room, stems hang down. The stems are moderately thick except in shady forests, where it grows as thin, upright woody stems. The bark is smooth, and dark red, light brown or medium gray.

As a final tip, the color of orange and red leaves persists for several weeks after they fall. Therefore, in August through October observing the litter layer sometimes alerts us that poison-oak is present.

Duplication permitted for free distribution. The Museum of Natural History's address is: State Park Rd., Morro Bay, CA 93442. The poison-oak web site address is: www.curtbeebe.com

POISON-OAK IDENTIFICATION

San Luis Obispo Coast District
California State Parks

Curt Beebe, M.D.
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Figure 1. "Leaves of three, leave them be!"

The best way to learn what poison-oak looks like is to have someone show you over and over, until you always recognize it by yourself. Take this pamphlet with you on walks. The pictures will help you learn.

On the list of the Museum's "Adventures With Nature" trips, places with poison-oak are marked with an asterisk (*).



Figure 2. First Foliage of year: early March; beefy red color; very folded, like an insect just out of its cocoon.



Figure 3. Mature leaf: after March 15; three leaflets; the stalk of the terminal leaflet is always longer than the 0 to 3/16" long stalks of the lateral leaflets. If a leaf is not typical check other leaves nearby.

Late April: Only plant with a light green color.

When plants run out of water they Change color and then drop their leaves. Which color depends on the time of year.

July: In the driest places the leaves turn yellow and fall off.

August: orange leaves



Figure 4. August and September: Alternate leaves; a cluster of roots; black spots on stem and leaves where plant was injured. It also shows three new branches and five leaves; one leaf is missing a leaflet.

September and early October: red-orange leaves.

Late October: red leaves



Figure 5. Nov 1: A stem from a place where the sun shone directly on the plants part of the day: cream colored berries; stalks of berries that have dropped; many side branches coming off the tip of a stem at nearly right angles.