

December EcoQuest – White berries? Beware!

Have you ever noticed white berries along your favorite hiking trail? Well, while some white berries are completely harmless, there is one white berry to be cautious of – those of *Toxicodendron rydbergii*, or western poison ivy. During the spring and summer, poison ivy is easily identifiable by the presence of “leaves in threes” or leaves comprised of three shiny leaflets. However, in the winter the leaves are gone, leaving only the white berries behind, and making it more difficult to identify.

Some people have a severe allergic reaction to poison ivy, while others have no or little response. An oily substance on the plants called urushiol causes this allergic reaction. The more exposure to poison ivy you have over time, the more severe your allergic reaction tends to be. Touching any part of the plant, even in winter, can cause a rash. Poison ivy is a member of the cashew or sumac family, Anacardiaceae. This is why many people

with severe allergies to cashews also have severe allergic reactions to poison ivy.

Although the common name “poison ivy” is used, this name was first applied to the eastern poison ivy species, *Toxicodendron radicans*, because of the similarity in climbing habit with English ivy. *Toxicodendron rydbergii* is a low-growing shrub that does not climb at all. Other *Toxicodendron* species in North America include poison oak and poison sumac, neither of which are actual oaks or sumacs but whose leaves resemble these species.

See if you can (carefully!) locate some *Toxicodendron rydbergii* and help Denver Botanic Gardens by photographing as many plants as possible in the month of December. Post your findings on [iNaturalist](#) so they will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).



Toxicodendron rydbergii, [emlok](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC 4.0.

November EcoQuest Results – Seeking spike moss

One observation of *Selaginella* was made in November but is currently not Research Grade yet.

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests are part of the Denver EcoFlora Project. These monthly quests challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the Denver – Boulder metro area via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is okay if they are weeds! Avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.

3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive plants or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the “geoprivacy” of the observation to “obscured.”
4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.
6. Sign up to be a member of the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#) on iNaturalist to receive updates and additional information.

What is the Goal?

The Denver EcoFlora Project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area’s flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin