



Biting Bugs and Plants to Avoid



O-T-T-A-W-A
NATIONAL FOREST

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Visiting the Ottawa is a fun and exciting way to experience the great outdoors. However, being in a wooded environment brings its own challenges. Here are a few of the “pests” and “plants” you should try to avoid. In the event of a severe allergic reaction to an insect bite or sting, or plant contact, please seek medical assistance.



Photo by Dept. of Entomology, Oklahoma State University

Black Flies

What to watch for: Black flies are one of the most dreaded pests in the western Upper Peninsula. They are small, hump-backed and dark colored. They slash the skin to lap up blood. They will bite any exposed skin and are adept at getting under clothes. Oftentimes, you won't notice a bite until you feel a small scab—some people will get a large, itchy welt that will last for days. Black flies only feed during the day, so you can expect some relief after the sun sets.

When to expect them: Late April into July



Photo by Sturgis McKeever, Georgia Southern University

Deer Flies

What to watch for: Deer flies are the premier daylight blood sucker during the summer. Larger than a house fly, they prefer sunny places, such as lake edges, trails, fields, etc., and quickly disappear once you enter the shade of the forest. Deer flies are aggressive and their skin slashing bites can be quite painful. Deer flies only feed during the day, biting any exposed skin (but they prefer the head). A hat is definitely useful for keeping them out of your hair! Horseflies are larger, similar biting flies.

When to expect them: June into August



Photo by Susan Ellis
www.insectimages.org

Mosquitoes

What to watch for: The Upper Peninsula is well known for its mosquitoes—not so much for their size, but for the sheer magnitude of their abundance. Their habitat is standing water: ponds, puddles, tree holes, old tires, etc. Mosquitoes are major carriers of disease. Especially busy at night because they easily dehydrate in the sun, mosquitoes will readily feed anytime if it is sufficiently humid and shady. Definitely bring the “bug spray” with you!

When to expect them: Early Spring into August



Photo by E.T. Schidtmann, USDA/ARS

No-see-ums, punkies

What to watch for: As their name implies, these are very small insects. Their bites feel like a pinprick and are surprisingly painful considering their size. They breed in a variety of habitats such as ponds, stream margins, tree holes, and moist forest floor leaf litter. Due to their small size, they are prone to dehydration; therefore, they are primarily nocturnal or dusk-dawn feeders.

When to expect them: June thru July



Photo by Jim Kalish, Dept. of Entomology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Stable Flies

What to watch for: A lesser known pest in the Upper Peninsula, but in some ways it is the worst. They look similar to a normal house fly, but their bite is painful! They breed in decaying vegetation (particularly the vegetation that washes up on the shores of lakes). At their peak abundance they make the beaches along Lake Superior a misery. They tend to feed low, so watch your ankles!

When to expect them: June thru July

Wood Ticks



Deer Ticks



Wood and Deer ticks

What to watch for: Closely related to spiders, ticks are one of the major blood sucking invertebrates in western Upper Peninsula. Ticks can be found anywhere, but are most abundant in grassy areas such as fields or roadsides. It's not uncommon to pick 30+ wood ticks off during a day in the woods. Deer ticks are less than half the size of a wood tick and much rarer. Ticks are known to carry a number of diseases, including Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, and Lyme disease (only deer ticks carry Lyme disease). An attached tick should be removed by grasping as close to the skin as possible and pulling slowly and steadily. Be sure to remove any mouthparts that are left at the point of attachment.

When to expect them: Early Spring thru Early September



Photo by J. Kline, UW-Stevens Point Freckmann Herbarium

Poison Ivy

What to watch for: Poison ivy is perhaps responsible for more itchy rashes than any other plant. In the western Upper Peninsula poison ivy occurs in a shrubby form. Poison ivy leaves occur in threes. The leaflets are shiny green and alternate on the stem. The plant has white berries in autumn.

Poison ivy plants contain an oil that can cause an allergic reaction in many people (including those who previously seemed immune). The rash does not occur immediately after touching the plant and may not show up for several days. Washing after exposure can remove some of the oil and is a good idea. The itchy rash and blisters can be treated with over the counter steroid creams and various other methods. Some people swear by very hot water to relieve the itch, others use the sap of jewelweed.

Where you'll find it: Poison ivy is common in rocky areas, wet woods and a variety of other areas.



Photo by K. Kohout, UW-Stevens Point Freckmann Herbarium

Wild Parsnip

What to watch for: Wild parsnip, along with other members of the parsley family, can cause a burn/rash that results when skin contacts sap and then sunlight. It has a yellow, flat umbrella-shaped flower head. Stems are tall, hollow, and ridged. Leaves have several lobes, and are alternate with their stems sheathing the main stem.

Skin exposed to the sap and then to sunlight can develop severe blisters and discoloration. Long-sleeved shirts and pants can prevent contact with sap. Washing after contact and avoiding sunlight can also help prevent the burn. Mild burns can be treated with cool, wet cloths; more severe burns may need steroid creams or other treatments.

Where you'll find it: Wild parsnip occurs in open areas such as roadsides, meadows, and stream banks. The plant is considered invasive and can form large patches.



Photo by J. Stiefel, UW-Stevens Point Freckmann Herbarium

Stinging Nettles, Wood Nettles

What to watch for: Walking through a patch of nettles is like being stung by many tiny bees. The sting is slightly delayed after contact, so that a hiker can be in the middle of a patch with no “nettle-free” exit before realizing what is happening. Nettles can be 2 to 3 feet tall and form large patches. Stinging nettles have opposite leaves, while wood nettles have alternate leaves. Nettle plants are covered in tiny, hollow, fragile hairs holding an irritant liquid which is injected into skin on contact that breaks the hairs.

This results in small white bumps on the skin and a burning/itching sensation which can last several hours. Most nettle rash does not need treatment, but washing with cool water or a paste of baking soda and water may help. The hairs can penetrate thin clothing, but thicker pants and shirts will prevent the sting.

Where you'll find it: Nettles occur in wetter, wooded areas such as floodplains, stream banks, swamps, ditches, shores and similar areas.

Other Plants to Watch for:

Thorns and prickles: Several shrubs and trees on the Ottawa have thorns or prickles which can tear the skin. Caution is suggested around raspberry, blackberry, and currant bushes; wild roses; thistles and hawthorns.

Other rash-raising plants: For some people this includes show lady's slipper, wild ginger, leatherwood, and hops.

Poisonous if ingested: Many plants on the Ottawa have poisonous fruits, bark, leaves, roots and other parts. Some are deadly, some just cause extremely unpleasant symptoms. *Never ingest wild plants unless you have a positive identification as an edible plant. Do not assume a plant is safe to eat because you see a bird or squirrel eat it.*

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