



## Native Tree Leaves Activity Set

### Activity #3: Leaves of three, leave them be

You've likely heard the warning "leaves of three, leave them be"? We often hear that warning in reference to poison ivy, a plant whose leaves can cause itchy irritation on our skin. Whenever you're exploring nature, it's important to keep in mind that some plants are best left untouched. Now that you're a budding leaf expert, let's take a closer look at the phrase "leaves of three, leave them be".

#### Goals

- Creatively apply botanical terminology

#### Materials

- None

**Exercise 1:** Ask the students how they feel about the phrase "leaves of three, leave them be". There are no wrong answers here. Some students may value the phrase for its short and simple description. When we consider all the learning the students are doing to familiarize themselves with botanical terminology, we can appreciate that the phrase "leaves of three, leave them be" can be easy to understand for many people. On the flip side, we can consider if the phrase "leaves of three, leave them be" accurately describes poison ivy. Ask the students if poison ivy has 3 leaves or 1 leaf made up of 3 leaflets (answer- poison ivy has a compound leaf made up of 3 leaflets). Do the students think they would be able to avoid poison ivy if they followed the warning phrase?

The main problem with "leaves of three, leave them be" is that there are many plants with three leaves, including Ontario's provincial flower, the White Trillium.

**Exercise 2:** Go outside and see if you can find other examples of plants with three leaves. Once you're back inside reflect on how many plants you found with three leaves.

**Exercise 3:** After completing activity 2 and reviewing the Leafy Learning leaf characteristic sheet you now know how to properly describe leaves. Using some of the vocabulary reviewed in activity 2, create an accurate phrase to help people avoid touching poison ivy. Remember to have fun when creating the warning phrase!

Hopefully, you are better equipped to avoid poison ivy next time you are out in nature. While poison ivy may cause us discomfort, it's actually a valuable native plant. Many animals feast on poison ivy's fruit and seek shelter in its foliage.