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Rhus tree (toxicodendron)

Common name: Rhus, rhus tree, Japanese wax tree (not the Japanese lacquer tree), scarlet rhus, sumac, wax tree.

Botanical name: *Toxicodendron succedaneum*

Family: Anacardiaceae

Origin: There are 15 species of Toxicodendron native to China, at least 8 to Malaysia/Indonesia, and 6 to the Western hemisphere, although they have been introduced elsewhere as exotics

Description: Most Toxicodendron are small trees, shrubs or vines with compound leaves, the exception being *T. borneense* which has simple leaves. The flowers are generally asexual with 5 sepals (or calyx lobes), five petals, and five stamens. The ovary has 1 locule, with a short style and three stigmas. All produce the skin-irritating oil urushiol, which can cause a severe allergic reaction; hence the scientific name which means 'poison tree'.

The main species of Toxicodendron to cause dermatological problems are *T. radicans* (poison ivy) and *T. diversilobum* (poison oak) which, with their various subspecies, are found predominantly in Northern America. In the Southern Pacific, the three main allergenic toxicodendron are *T. striatum*, *T. succedaneum*, and *T. vernicifluum*.

Toxicodendron succedaneum is a large shrub or tree, up to 8 m tall, somewhat similar to a sumac tree. The leaves turn orange, red or scarlet in autumn. Small, yellow flowers are followed by pendulous clusters of tawny fruit.



Uses: An ornamental garden tree. In Japan, the tree is cultivated for the fruits from which a wax (sumach wax) is extracted for use in varnishes, polishes, ointments, and plasters.

Allergens: Urushiol; 3-heptadec(en)yl catechol.

Allergy: Toxicodendron species contain oleoresins known collectively as urushiol. In susceptible individuals, these compounds trigger a type IV delayed hypersensitivity reaction, a bullous [allergic contact dermatitis](#). Toxicodendron dermatitis is the most common cause of contact dermatitis in the United States, exceeding all other causes combined (usually due to contact with Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) or Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*)).

Toxicodendron dermatitis



Cross reactions: Anacardaceae ([mango](#), cashew, Japanese lacquer, Indian marking nut, and African poison ivy). Interestingly there are also several genera of unrelated families such as [ginkgo](#) and [grevillea](#) which, may cross-react with *Toxicodendron* spp.

Other information:

Patch test: Discouraged because of risk of sensitisation.

References

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If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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