



## Severe eye injury from Devil's Club (*Oplopanax horridus*)

A forestry worker was struck in the face with Devil's Club while collecting field data. The worker stepped on a prickly shrub and, as she moved her foot, the shrub sprang back and hit her in the side of the face. Two prickles became embedded in her left eye, and a 40-minute surgery was required to remove them.

### What is Devil's Club, and where is it found?

Devil's Club (scientific name: *Oplopanax horridus*) is a large plant in the ginseng family. It thrives in moist woods and along streams, from sea level to over 1,500 metres (the sub-alpine zone). The plant is native to British Columbia and found all along the Pacific coast from Alaska to southern Oregon. Devil's Club grows up to 6 metres tall and has large (20 to 40 centimetres across), maple-shaped leaves. It produces small white flowers in spring and bright red fruits in summer. The fruits are considered poisonous to humans but are eaten by bears.

Many Pacific Northwest and Alaskan aboriginal groups use the berries, roots, and inner bark for religious and medicinal purposes. An extract of the inner bark has been shown to have anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties.

### Which parts of the plant are harmful?

Both the stem and leaves are covered with sharp prickles that are up to 2 centimetres long! In addition to physical damage to the eyes and skin, there is evidence that the spiny prickles can cause serious allergic reactions in some individuals.



*Devil's Club*



*Leaf underside with prickles*

## How can I protect myself?

Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when working in areas where Devil's Club is growing. Protective goggles or safety glasses with side shields are recommended when walking through patches of brush that exceed shoulder height. Wear heavy, leather or canvas gloves when handling the plants.

## How do I apply first aid?

After skin contact, immediately remove the prickles with tweezers and wash the skin carefully with soap and water. Application of an anti-inflammatory cream (e.g., a 0.5% hydrocortisone cream) may reduce skin irritation. These creams are available in most pharmacy stores. If a rash develops, consult a physician.

If prickles become stuck in the eyes, flush with copious amounts of water and seek emergency first aid.



*Stem with prickles*



*Wear heavy gloves and safety eyewear when working around Devil's Club*



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