That is why

Why can the manchineel tree burn your skin?

Every part holds a milky, irritating sap. Rain washes it down, smoke carries it, and the fruit burns the mouth.

A Standing under it in the rain



Rain mixes with sap on the leaves and bark and drips down, so you can be burned without touching the tree.

B Three ways it harms

1 Sap on skin

Milky sap from leaves, bark and fruit causes burn-like blisters, even a drop carried by rain.

2 Smoke in the eyes

Burning the wood releases the irritants. Smoke has caused eye swelling and brief blindness.

3 The "beach apple"

The green fruit tastes sweet at first, then burns the mouth and throat and can cause severe stomach illness.

C Key facts

Hippomane mancinella

Record
Listed by Guinness World Records as the most dangerous tree.

Toxins
Phorbol esters and other irritants in the sap.

Where
Coasts of Florida, the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America.

Size
Shrub or tree up to about 15 m; fruit 2.5 to 5 cm across.

Immune?
Black-spined iguanas eat the fruit and live in its branches.

The tree never strikes. Rain, smoke and hunger do the damage.

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