

Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)

WI NR-40:
Restricted

DESCRIPTION:

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is a small shrub commonly used in landscaping. It was first introduced to the eastern United States in 1875 from Japan. Unfortunately, it is now showing itself to be an aggressive invasive species. It can form dense stands in natural areas far from the nearest landscape planting, growing from the seeds transported by birds and mammals. Japanese barberry has been found to invade full shade to full sun habitats including wetlands, but prefers upland sites with full sun to partial shade. European barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) is less common than the Japanese species, however it is unclear if this is because the species is less aggressive or because of eradication efforts implemented in the early 20th century to eliminate this alternate host for wheat rust. In either case, non-native barberries should be phased out of use in landscaping and aggressively eliminated when found in the wild.

Barberry is a spiny shrub that grows from 2 to 6 ft. in height. This species can be identified by its deeply grooved branches and clustered oval shaped leaves close to the branch. The pale yellow flowers are umbrella shaped and hang along the stem while in bloom from mid spring to early summer. These later develop into glossy, red, oval shaped berries. European barberry can be distinguished from Japanese barberry by its serrated leaf margins and clusters of fruit. Both have distinctive tear-drop shaped leaves, drooping fruit and leaf out early in the spring and retain their leaves late into fall.



CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Younger shrubs can be pulled out, but wear thick gloves. Mature shrubs may need to be dug up with a shovel or weed wrench. Like any shrub, barberry will resprout vigorously when cut, so if you cut them, revisit each cut stump every 2-3 weeks to remove new growth; do this repeatedly until the plant dies. Invasive barberry is not adapted to living in fire dependent communities so frequent prescribed burns are an effective technique of killing and preventing future establishment.

Chemical: Herbicides containing Tricolpyr (Garlon®, etc) or met-sulfuron (Escort) have been found to be more effective than glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) at killing invasive barberry. We recommend cutting the shrub down and treating the stump with a cut-stump (high) concentration of these herbicides (as recommended on the product label), but you can also apply a foliar spray, especially to smaller, isolated plants.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

American barberry (*Berberis canadensis*) would seem like an obvious alternative however it is not currently available commercially. Wild Gooseberry (*Ribes missouriense*) will grow in shade and sun with delicate yellow flowers in spring and bird-attracting berries in late summer and fall, and can even match barberry for thorniness. For sunny sites, New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americana*) is a fine quality, low stature landscaping shrub. For short stature shrubs in the shade, look to snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) or dwarf bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*).



Cut stems reveal bright yellow inner wood.

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