



Photo by: Kate O'Hanlon

JAPANESE BARBERRY

Japanese barberry, *Berberis thunbergii*, was originally imported to the US in 1875 as an ornamental shrub to replace our native species of barberry (*Berberis canadensis*) in the landscape, and continues to be used in modern-day landscaping. Native to Japan and eastern Asia, its ornamental bright red berries are frequently eaten by birds who spread the seeds to neighboring areas.

Japanese Barberry has become problematic in natural areas because of its high shade tolerance and tendency to form dense thickets, crowding out many of our more delicate native species. Research has shown that these thickets tend to have higher densities of ticks, making them a potential health hazard to hikers. The leaf litter of this species is particularly detrimental to the ecosystem because it changes the surrounding soil chemistry, by raising soil pH and Nitrogen levels, making the habitat less suitable for native species.

Some identifying characteristics of Japanese Barberry are small oval-shaped clusters of leaves and very sharp needle-like spines. The notable bright red berries are most visible in the fall, and if branches are cut the interior is bright yellow.

Japanese Barberry tends to have a tough but shallow root system, making it possible to hand pull or dig up smaller infestations. Herbicides labeled for broadleaf control can also be used either as a foliar spray or on the cut stumps.



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QUICK FACTS

- Ornamental shrub native to Japan and eastern Asia
- Small, oval shaped leaves
- Sharp, needle-like spines
- Bright red fruits
- Yellow heartwood
- Can spread to natural areas by birds
- Thickets harbor high densities of ticks
- Leaf litter can increase soil pH and Nitrogen

