



Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is a deciduous shrub that was imported to the United States in the late 1800s. The shrub, native to Asia, was prized for its ornamental properties and rapidly escaped and naturalized to the East Coast, where it is now found as far south as the Carolinas and as far north as Nova Scotia.

DISPERSAL & REPRODUCTION

Barberry seeds are distributed by birds and small mammals, and are remarkably fertile, with germination rates of up to 90 percent. Berries mature as early as July and persist into the winter. Japanese barberry is also capable of vegetative reproduction via root sprouts and “layering” from branches.

Japanese barberry is capable of growing in both highly-disturbed environments — such as abandoned fields, powerline rights-of-way, floodplains, and roadsides — and also undisturbed interior forest. Once an individual plant has established, it will reproduce into a dense thicket that outcompetes native understory species, and if left unchecked a monoculture of barberry will eventually result.

Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between the presence of Japanese barberry and Lyme disease. Two leading hypotheses are that the tips of barberry branches are an ideal perching spot for black-legged ticks, and that the plant itself provides cover for tick hosts like the white-footed mouse.

IDENTIFICATION: among the first species to leaf-out in spring; when mature, leaves are under 1.5 inches and spatula-shaped; branches have sharp spines; yellow flowers appear in spring in clusters of 2-4; bright red berries appear in the summer and remain through the winter.

CONTROL: mechanical pulling of stems and roots by hand (use gloves to protect hands from spines) or with a weed wrench, ideally when the soil is moist to ease pulling and ensure all of the root system is removed; hang or burn dead plants (do not compost); application of systemic herbicides and repeated mowing and cutting are also effective.



Japanese barberry is an easy species to spot in the spring, as its leaves are among the first to emerge. It can grow under a wide range of conditions, and can be found in the Upper Valley in these locations:

- Ornamental plantings all over Norwich and Hanover
- Powerline rights-of-way & roadsides
- Interior forest, particularly around old cellar holes.