

European barberry

Berberis vulgaris

Fact Sheet

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Common Name: European or Common barberry
New Hampshire Invasive Species Status: Prohibited (Agr 3800)

Latin Name: *Berberis vulgaris*
Native to: Europe



leaves (spring)



European barberry – Hanover, NH



Flower (spring)



Flowers (spring)



Thorns in threes



Seeds & fleshy fruit (fall)



Stem/bark (Summer)



Fall foliage (Autumn)



Fall foliage (Autumn)

Description: Shrub 3-8' in height by 3-6' in width. **Stems:** Tan bark with 3 long spines at each leaf axis. **Leaves:** Alternate, simple, 1/2"-11/2" long, bright green above, dull below. **Flowers:** Perfect, yellow, 1/2" long, mid-April to May. **Fruit:** Oblong drupe turning pale red in fall. **Zone:** 4-8. **Habitat:** Prefers full sun to partial shade and open spaces to wooded areas. **Spread:** Seeds are dispersed by birds and wildlife. **Comments:** Highly adaptable to most environments and is pollution tolerant. **Controls:** Hand pull young plants. Cut or mechanically remove older larger plants or apply approved herbicides for large populations.

General Considerations

Berberis vulgaris is an upright and arching shrub that can reach 10' in height producing a mass of erect, arching stems. The branches are grooved, gray and glabrous, and usually have groupings of three long clustered 1" spines. The foliage is dull green, about 1-2" long and ovate to oblong with finely serrate margins and arranged alternately in bundles (fascicled). Flowers are yellow and borne on pendulous racemes. These flowers appear from late May into June. The fruit are ellipsoid in shape, red in color and are around 1/2" long each containing 1-3 seeds. Early-fruiting plants typically produced fewer seeds/fruit than late-fruiting plants.

Though *Berberis vulgaris* is not very common on the landscape in most places, there is a risk that it could once again become a serious pest. The fact that it is an alternate host for wheat rust

Birds and livestock are the most common dispersers of common barberry seed. However, small mammals, including small rodents, can often be a mechanism for seed dispersal. In riparian habitats seeds can easily drop into the watercourse and readily float downstream to other locations. Seeds separated from their fruit often germinate in the 1st year, while seeds contained in their fruits often have a delayed germination and sprout the 2nd year. Germination rates tend to be higher under shady conditions compared to those seeds found in full sun.

Common barberry acts as an alternate host for cereal stem rust (*Puccinia graminis*), which can severely reduce cereal crop yields. In the early 1900's crop failure was common due to cereal stem rusts outbreaks so in 1918 the United States created a barberry eradication program to remove them from the landscape.

Control Options

See the following control guides: [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) for Woody Plants](#) or the [Control of Invasive Species by Numbers](#)

<i>European barberry</i> <i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	
Plant Type	Shrub
Habitat Type	Forests, fields, roadsides, wetlands, coastal areas
USDA Hardiness Zone	4-8
Rooting Structure	Fibrous, rhizomatous, shallow to deep
Environmental Impacts	Alternate host for cereal stem rust (<i>Puccinia graminis</i>), which can severely reduce cereal crop yields
Wildlife Impacts	Loss of habitat
Leaf arrangement	Alternate
NWI Ranking	UPL, FCU
Soil Type	Dry to moist soils
Soil pH Range	3.7 to 7.0
Light Requirements	Prefers partial to full sun, shade
Growing Season	
Growth Rate	2 to 4 feet (0.6-1.2 m) per year
Mature Height	10 ft. (3 m)
Life Span	Moderate
Reproductive Age	2-7 years
Flowering Period	April-May
Flower Type	Monoecious
Pollination	Insects
Seed Set	August - September
Seed Per Plant	2,000 - 4,000
Scarification Required	Yes
Cold Stratification	Yes
Seed Longevity	9 years
Seed Germination Rate	72-88%
Seedling Density	?
Other Propagules	Layering, suckering
Dispersal Vectors	Wildlife & water

Sources

Mehrhoff, L., 2001. Invasive Plant Atlas of New England, Catalog of Species, http://www.eddmaps.org/ipane/ipanespecies/shrubs/Berberis_vulgaris.htm

USDA Forest Service invasive species website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/shrub/bervul/all.html>

USDA: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/main/docs.htm?docid=10755>

Invasives.org: <http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=5181>

Bugwood: http://wiki.bugwood.org/Berberis_vulgaris