

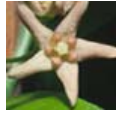


# Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

## Catalog of Species Search Results

### *Berberis thunbergii*

(Japanese barberry )



[:: Catalog of Species Search](#)



[Common Name\(s\)](#) | [Full Scientific Name](#) | [Family Name Common](#) | [Family Scientific Name](#) | [Images](#) | [Synonyms](#) | [Description](#) | [Similar Species](#) | [Reproductive/Dispersal Mechanisms](#) | [Distribution](#) | [History of Introduction in New England](#) | [Habitats in New England](#) | [Threats](#) | [Early Warning Notes](#) | [Management Links](#) | [Documentation Needs](#) | [Additional Information](#) | [References](#) | [Data Retrieval](#) | [Maps of New England Plant Distribution](#)

#### COMMON NAME

Japanese barberry

#### FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Berberis thunbergii* DC

#### FAMILY NAME COMMON

Barberry family

#### FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Berberidaceae

#### IMAGES



Habit



Inflorescence



Understory incursion



Purple morph



Incursion

## Fruits



Seedlings



Branch with fruit

**NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS**

**Synonyms:** *Berberis thunbergii* var. *atropurpurea* Chenault  
*B. sinensis* Koch not Desf.  
*B. japonica* Hort.

**DESCRIPTION**Botanical Glossary

*Berberis thunbergii* is a dense deciduous shrub 0.5-2.4 m (2-8 ft.) tall. It flowers from mid April to May in the Northeast and its fruits mature from July to October.

The branches are glabrous, deeply grooved, brown and have usually simple spines. The leaves are glaucescent underneath, spatulate or narrowly obovate in shape, and are 1.3-3.8 cm (0.5-1.5 in.) long. They range in color from slightly bluish-green to green to dark reddish purple. The pale yellow flowers of *Berberis thunbergii* are profuse and located along the entire length of the stem. The inflorescences are umbellate with the 8 mm (0.3 in.) long flowers in clusters of 2-4. Bright red berries 7-9 mm (0.28-0.35in.) in length are elliptic or nearly globose in form. The fruits are slightly juicy but solid, and persist on the stems until the following spring.

Page References Bailey 410, Fernald 674, Flora of North America 279, Gleason & Cronquist 64, Holmgren 62, Magee & Ahles 517, Newcomb 354. See reference section below for full citations.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**

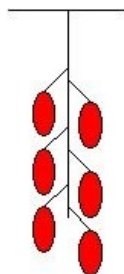
*Berberis vulgaris* L. (Common barberry)  
*Berberis x ottawensis* Schneid. (hybrid of *B. thunbergii* and *B. vulgaris*)

\*Below are cartoons comparing the inflorescences of the three species.

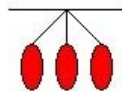
\*\*In New England, observed to be almost always entire.

Character	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	<i>Berberis x ottawensis</i>	<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>
Branch spines	1 (can have up to 3)	varies	3 (can be 1)

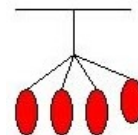
Inflorescence*	sessile umbel	Subumbellate-raceme	Raceme
Leaf margin	Entire	Most often entire**	Serrate
Berry consistency	Dry	Dry	Juicy



*Berberis vulgaris*



*Berberis thunbergii*



*Berberis x ottawensis*

## REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

The fruit of *Berberis thunbergii* are dispersed by birds, which are most often ground birds such as turkey and grouse. Small mammals can also contribute to their dispersal. This plant can also spread when its branches come in contact with the soil and root.

## DISTRIBUTION

*Berberis thunbergii* is native to Japan. In the United States it has spread throughout the northeast with the exception of the Adirondaks, northern Maine and northern Vermont. It is also located north to Michigan and south to North Carolina and Missouri. *Berberis thunbergii* is present in all the states of New England.

## HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

*Berberis thunbergii* was first introduced to the United States (and New England) as an ornamental in 1875, via seeds sent from Russia to the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. In 1896 it was planted at the New York Botanic Garden. *Berberis thunbergii* was later promoted as a substitute for *Berberis vulgaris*, which was planted by early settlers from Europe for hedgerows, dye and jam. *Berberis thunbergii* was not a host for the black stem grain rust, whereas *Berberis vulgaris* was. In the northeast, it appears that *Berberis thunbergii* did not become naturalized until about 1910 when it became more popularly planted at people's vacation homes. In Nantucket and Isle au Haut it was recognized as a garden escape before 1910. At Isle au Haut, it was reported to have "escaped from the village." There were also early sightings in New Hampshire near Mount Monadnock in 1913 by Manning, who mentioned that he was "constantly seeing seedlings some distance from the original plants."

## HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Abandoned Field  
Early Successional Forest  
Edge  
Floodplain Forest  
Forest Wetland  
Late Successional Forest  
Pasture  
Planted Forest  
Railroad Right-of-Way  
Roadside  
Shrub Wetland  
Utility Right-of-Way  
Vacant Lot  
Yard or Garden

*Berberis thunbergii* can be found in a variety of different habitats throughout New England. Initially this plant was described as inhabiting open fields and pastures. However, *Berberis thunbergii* is also associated with closed-canopy forests, woodlands and wetlands. In these habitats, it has the ability to form dense, continuous stands.

## THREATS

*Berberis thunbergii* is shade tolerant, and forms dense stands in a variety habitats ranging from closed canopy forests, to woodlands, wetlands, pastures, meadows and wasteland. It is readily dispersed by birds, which can bring the seeds many meters away from the parent plants. Though the exact effect on native flora is not determined, it could prove a great threat to native species. This threat is such that the plant is illegal for sale in Canada, and included on some banned lists in New England.

## MANAGEMENT LINKS

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

[The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group Invasive Plant Management Guide](#)  
Comprehensive management information

[Plant Conservation Alliance fact sheet](#)  
Includes management information

[Global Invasive Species Database](#)

## DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: Photograph of the habit of the plant or the braches and inflorescences.

Best time for documentation: Spring, summer, fall.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### [Integrated Taxonomic Information System](#)

Has general taxonomic information about the species.

### [The PLANTS Database](#)

Distribution/general information, maps, and links

### [Brooklyn Botanic Garden](#)

General information, key, and references

### [University of Connecticut Plant database](#)

General information and images

### [www.invasive.org](#)

General information and images

### [Virginia Tech Dendrology Page](#)

General description including photographs

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## DATA RETRIEVAL

Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- Formatted display as table
- Export as comma-delimited text file

## MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- The whole New England area
- One or more states
- One or more counties
- One or more towns (county sub-divisions)

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