



## Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

### Catalog of Species Search Results



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## *Berberis vulgaris*

(Common barberry  
European barberry )

[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

Common barberry  
European barberry

### FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Berberis vulgaris* L.

### FAMILY NAME COMMON

Barberry family

### FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Berberidaceae

### IMAGES



Inflorescence



Leaf close-up



Branch Morphology - *B. vulgaris*, top; Hybrid, middle; *B. thunbergii*, bottom



Close-up of  
spines

## NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

**Synonyms:** None

## DESCRIPTION

### Botanical Glossary

*Berberis vulgaris* is an upright and arching shrub that can reach 3 m (10 ft.) in height. The branches are grooved, gray and glabrous, and usually have groupings of three spines (or as few as one) along them. The spines are usually rounded, but can rarely be flattened. The dull green leaves are obovate to obovate-oblong and have finely serrate margins (occasionally the serrations are more prominent). The leaves are alternate or fascicled and are 2-5 cm (0.75-2 in.) in length.

The bright yellow flowers of *Berberis vulgaris* have an unpleasant smell. They are arranged in pendant racemes that can be 3-6 cm (1-2 in.) long with 10 to 20 flowers on each. These flowers usually appear from late May into June. The fruit are ellipsoid in shape, red in color and are around 1 cm (0.4 in.) long. They contain 1-3 small, black seeds.

Page References Bailey 411, Fernald 674, Flora of North America 277, Gleason & Cronquist 64, Holmgren 62, Magee & Ahles 517, Newcomb 354. See reference section below for full citations.

## SIMILAR SPECIES

*Berberis thunbergii* DC. (Japanese barberry)

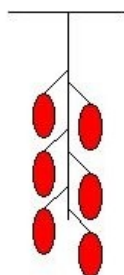
*Berberis x ottawensis* Schneid. (hybrid of *B. thunbergii* and *B. vulgaris*)

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

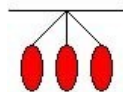
\*\*In New England, observed to be almost always entire.

Character	<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	<i>Berberis x ottawensis</i>	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>
Branch spines	3 (can be 1)	varies	1 (can have up to 3)
Inflorescence*	Raceme	Subumbellate-raceme	Sessile umbel

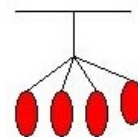
Leaf margin	Serrate	Most often entire**	Entire
Berry consistency	Juicy	Dry	Dry



*Berberis vulgaris*



*Berberis thunbergii*



*Berberis x ottawensis*

## REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

The fruit of *Berberis vulgaris* are dispersed by birds. Small mammals can also contribute to their dispersal. It can also spread when branches come in contact with the soil, producing new plants.

## DISTRIBUTION

*Berberis vulgaris* is native to continental Europe except for the extreme north, and is rare in the Mediterranean region. In the United States it has been reported from most states in the northern half of the country and south to New Mexico, Missouri and South Carolina. It is present in all of the states of New England.

## HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

*Berberis vulgaris* was introduced in the United States as early as the 17th century when early settlers planted it for producing jam from its fruits, yellow dye, and thorn hedges. It naturalized over a large area of the northeast. Eventually, it was recognized as being an alternate host for wheat rust, *Puccinia graminis*. As a consequence a huge effort was made to eradicate the plant in the early 20th century, and this effort was rather successful. *Berberis vulgaris* is now found sporadically across the landscape: it appears to have been eradicated in some areas, while it persists quite abundantly in others, especially near the coast. The Japanese barberry, *Berberis thunbergii*, was encouraged as an alternative planting, but has turned out to be an extremely problematic invasive in New England.

## HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Abandoned Field  
 Coastal Grassland  
 Early Successional Forest  
 Edge  
 Floodplain Forest

Forest Wetland  
Open Disturbed Area  
Pasture  
Planted Forest  
Roadside  
Shrub Wetland  
Vacant Lot  
Yard or Garden

*Berberis vulgaris* is found sporadically in New England, usually in open-canopied forests and sometimes along roads. It is also very successful in calcareous soils.

## THREATS

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 prevents its sale (seeds and plants) in many states.

## MANAGEMENT LINKS

[Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group \(CIPWG\)](#)

Though this information is for *Berberis thunbergii*, it also applies to *Berberis vulgaris*.

## DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: Specific photograph or mounted snippet of the inflorescences or the leaves on stem.

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, references, and photographs

## REFERENCES

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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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