

**Beale's barberry MABE2**

***Mahonia bealei*** (Fortune) Carrière

Synonyms: *Berberis bealei* Fortune, leatherleaf mahonia

**From:** Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

**Family: Berberidaceae**

**Plant.** Evergreen shrub, erect and gangly or multi-stemmed from a pronounced rootcrown (with shallow roots) up to 10 feet (3 m) in height and branching to 4 to 8 feet (1.2 to 2.4 m) wide. Leathery, odd-pinnately compound leaves radiate outward on long stalks from the stem with spiny, holly-like leaflets. Terminal, radiating stems of fragrant, yellow flowers in late winter to spring, yield robin's egg blue fruit in summer that mature to bluish black. Fruits are covered by whitish wax during winter. Wood and roots bright yellow.

**Stem.** Terminal stem growth comprised of crowded and overlapping broad leaf bases, light green or purple on seedlings, soon encased in thin, tan to gray, fissured bark. The clasping leaf bases remain greenish and spaced at intervals along stout stems.

**Leaves.** Odd-pinnately compound, over 1 foot (30 cm) long on purplish stalks, stiff and spiraling out at intervals from the main stem with 9 to 13 leathery leaflets, 1 to 4 inches (2.5 to 10 cm) long. Leaflets with 5 to 7 extremely sharp marginal spines, holly-like, with no petioles and the terminal leaflet being largest. Lustrous green above with a lighter midvein and pale green beneath. Seedlings initially have simple heart-shaped leaflets on long petioles with many spines around the margins and often very white waxy beneath.

**Flowers.** January to April. Plants are topped with 6 to 12 unbranched, bluish to purplish stems with dangling yellow fragrant flowers, opening from base to tip. Pollinated by insects.

**Fruit and seeds.** April to August. Many fleshy-skinned, egg-shaped berries, 0.4 to 0.7 inches (1 to 1.8 cm) long, dangle from bracts on a purplish stalk. Berries white waxy coated, light green turning robin's egg blue and ripening purplish black, each with 2 to 3 seeds.

**Ecology.** Moderate in growth rate in a full range of soil textures and light conditions, but prefers moist soils. Tolerates cold however young plants can be damaged by late frosts. Colonizes by basal sprouts and spreads by many bird-dispersed seeds from ornamental and escaped plants. Seed from ripe fruit can immediately germinate. Hybridizes with other mahonias.

**Resembles** both hollyleaved barberry [*Mahonia aquifolium* (Pursh) Nutt] and Cascade barberry [*Mahonia nervosa* (Pursh) Nutt], which are small low growing subshrubs having only 6 to 13 spiny teeth around their margins and are considered native to the United States.

**History and use.** Introduced in 1845 from China, Japan, and Taiwan as an ornamental. Still being sold and planted by unsuspecting gardeners.