

Japanese barberry BETH

***Berberis thunbergii* DC.**

Synonyms: *Berberis thunbergii* DC. var. *atropurpurea* Chenault

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. Tardily deciduous, compact and spreading shrub, 2 to 4 feet (60 to 120 cm) in height and slightly wider, occasionally 6 to 8 feet (1.8 to 3 m) in height. Multiple stems, slender and brown bearing single slender spines at alternate nodes along with tufts of small paddle-shaped leaves ranging from green to reddish and turning orange to golden to crimson in early winter. Tiny, dangling clusters of white flowers in spring yield red, fleshy, oblong berries. Roots shallow, yellow inside as are stems. The plant traits are variable due to numerous cultivars that are still being sold and planted.

Stem. Twigs slender, reddish-brown to gray, ridged to varying degrees, a single sharp spine to 0.6 inches (1.5 cm) long at each node, below a stubby, cone-like stacked bud (evident in winter). Stems sometimes wavy in appearance owing to numerous nodes. Alternate branching with bark becoming irregularly furrowed, light gray to tan, and scattered, stacked buds remaining.

Leaves. Alternate in tight clusters, spatulate (paddle shaped) with entire margins and narrowing bases to the stem with rounded or faintly pointed tips, variable due to cultivars, 0.5 to 1.5 inches (1.2 to 3.7 cm) long. Blue-green to green to reddish above and pale to whitish below, turning orange to red and crimson in winter, appearing early and remaining late.

Flowers. April to May. Dangling singly or in small clusters from most nodes, white to yellowish-white to yellow, 6 petals, 0.2 to 0.3 inch (5 to 6 mm) wide with yellow centers.

Fruit and seeds. May and maturing by October, remaining until March.

Dangling, egg-shaped berries, red and shiny, fleshy, 0.3 to 0.4 inches (8 to 11 mm) long. Each containing one brown, pitted seed, oblong, 0.08 to 0.20 inches (2 to 5 mm) long.

Ecology. Forms dense infestations under forest canopies but prefers partial shade of edges to exclude other plants. Seeds are dispersed by many wildlife species. Deer do not browse this species resulting in release from surrounding vegetation. Infestations intensify by root sprouts and rooting of drooping stems. Seeds remain viable for up to 10 years in the soil.

Resembles both the nonnative invasive common or European barberry (*Berberis vulgaris* L.) and the native American barberry (*Berberis canadensis* Mill.) while both have finely-bristled leaf margins. **Also resembles** a rare escaped wintergreen barberry (*Berberis julianae* C.K. Schneid.) in the mountains that has leathery, evergreen leaves.

History and use. Native to Japan and introduced into the U.S. as an ornamental in the mid 1870's. Numerous cultivars widely sold and planted with varying amounts of fruit production.