

Invasive Species Highlight

Japanese Barberry

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is native to Japan and was introduced to North America in the 1800s as a popular ornamental plant, a living fence, and for erosion control. Originally grown for its interesting foliage colors, deer resistance and adaptability to urban growing conditions, this species has been spreading to the understory of wooded areas in Minnesota. Japanese barberry is a restricted noxious weed, making it illegal to import, sell, or transport.

Environmental Impact

Japanese barberry alters soil chemistry to favor its own growth, leading to dense monocultures that crowd out native plants and animals. Deer avoid it and over browse native species, further reducing biodiversity. Its thorny thickets also restrict livestock movement and reduce wooded pasture quality. Barberry creates humid microclimates ideal for black-legged ticks resulting in higher Lyme disease carrying tick populations. Seeds are spread when birds eat the fruit.



Identification

- Small, compact, spiny shrub growing 3'-6' tall with slightly curving branches.
- Leaves are small, rounded, smooth, and are arranged in clusters above single spines and appear early in the spring.
- Flowers are yellow and attach to the stem in clusters of 2-4 blossoms, flowering in May.
- Fruits are small, bright red, egg-shaped berries found in clusters or alone and mature in August and stay on the shrub through winter.
- Spreads through lower branches that root when in contact with soil.

Look-alikes

Common barberry (invasive) - Toothed leaves with three prongs on the spines. Flowers can be in clusters of 10-20 flowers.

Prickly ash (native) - Compound leaves divided into 5-11 leaflets with thorns that are in pairs along the branch.



Report new occurrences

Submit a report through EDDMaps, iNaturalist, Seek or by contacting your local SWCD.

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For any questions, call Abbi Hoffman - 507-523-2171 x113

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References and Resources

- “*Berberis thunbergia* (Japanese Barberry)” *Minnesota Wildflowers*. <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/shrub/japanese-barberry>
- “Japanese barberry” *Minnesota Department of Agriculture*. <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/pestmanagement/weedcontrol/noxiouslist/japanesebarberry>
- “Japanese barberry” Gupta et al. *University of Minnesota Extension*. <https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/japanese-barberry>
- “Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)” *Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*. <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialplants/woody/japanesebarberry.html>



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