

Common barberry

Berberis vulgaris

Description

This plant is both poisonous and medicinal. Except for its fruits and seeds, the plant contains berberine, which is poisonous but also known to have therapeutic effects.

Habit

Armed, deciduous shrub growing 8-10 feet in height and 6 feet wide.

Leaves

Leaves grow in clusters on arched hanging branches. Small, toothed, ovate, alternate, dull green above and grayish below. On young sprouts they are spiny.

Stems

Gray in color and covered with sharp spines at nodes. The inner wood is yellow in color. Spines are double- or triple- branched.

Flowers

Yellow in color, perfect, 1/2 inch long, occur in





drooping racemes 1-2 inches long and have an unpleasant odor.

Fruits and Seeds

Berries are oblong and scarlet red to purple in color. They contain 1-3 small, black seeds.

Habitat

Native to Europe and Great Britain. Found in shaded and open woods, pastures, thickets, hedges, fencerows, roadsides, and clearings.

Reproduction

Spread by seed and by vegetative expansion.

Similar

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is similar but differs by its sharply toothed leaf margins and 3-pronged spines under each leaf cluster. It is also taller and more loosely branched than Japanese barberry.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

In early spring, use a hoe, weed wrench or mattock to uproot the entire bush and associated roots; remove entire root system to prevent resprouts. Use gloves to protect hands from spines. Regular mowing helps re-establishment after removal. Can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate or triclopyr. Its natural enemy is black stem grain rush (*Puccinia graminis*).

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