

COMMON BARBERRY

Berberis vulgaris

(Aka European barberry)



Overview:

Common barberry is a deciduous shrub that reproduces both by seed and vegetatively by rhizome spread. It is native to Asia but has been widely introduced throughout Europe. In the 18th & 19th centuries barberry was commonly grown in North America for thorn hedges, as a source of jam and yellow dye, and for medicinal uses. However, it is an alternate host for *Puccinia graminis*, a cereal stem rust and was soon blamed for wheat crop failures. By the 1800's New England colonies wrote laws restricting the planting and spread on common barberry.

Flowering occurs early summer and berry clusters form by September. Berries typically remain on the stem through winter.

The common barberry root crown is a thick, fibrous root mass. Lateral rhizome growth can extend 3-4m from the root crown. Rhizomes produce fibrous root masses once aerial shoots emerge.

Insects, birds and mammals commonly consume common barberry fruits and reduce the abundant seeds produced through predation. This also contributes to barberry's spread by rodent caching and bird excrement.

Habitat:

Common barberry occurs on a variety of soils, soil textures and pH, but proliferates on calcareous soils. It prefers dry to moist soils, but not wet. Common barberry is capable of growing in both full sun or full shade but has been observed most in partially cleared forest.

Identification:

Stems: Are erect, branching and grow to 3m tall. Simple or 3-pronged thorns 1 to 2 cm long occur at stem nodes. Older stems have grey, shredding bark.

Leaves: Simple, alternate leaves are often clustered on the stem. Leaves have finely serrated edges, are lance or egg-shaped, are 1 to 5.5 cm long, and widest at or just above middle.

Flowers: Inflorescences are 2-6 cm long and contain 10-20 flowers. Individual flowers have 6 petals, 6 stamens and are about 8 mm wide. The red/purple, egg-shaped berries are approximately 10 mm in diameter and contain 1-3 seeds. Seeds are about 6 mm long.

Prevention:

Common barberry is valued by some for its medicinal properties and its vibrant red foliage in fall and red berries in winter. However, invasive plants should never be cultivated under any circumstances.

Control:

Grazing: Cattle will consume common barberry fruits, but seeds survive digestion and are spread via manure. Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.

Mechanical: Digging and removal of common barberry's root mass can be effective but is labor intensive. Diligent removal of all root pieces is required to prevent new sprouts. Deeply buried rhizomes (0.3m or more) seldom re-sprout. Cutting of stems and top removal by fire results only in vigorous resprouting.

Chemical: Currently no selective herbicides are registered for use on common barberry. Always check product labels to ensure the herbicide is registered for use on the target plant in Canada by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Always read and follow label directions. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

Biological: There are no biological control agents available to date.

