



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Berberis thunbergii*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Japanese Barberry is thorny, so it's useful for barrier plantings (Fig. 1). The plant tolerates most light exposures and soils, but purple-leaved cultivars turn green in shade. This shrub grows slowly but transplants easily. It grows three to six feet tall and spreads four to seven feet. Japanese Barberry can be sheared and used as a hedge plant. The main ornamental features are persistent red fruits and fall color in shades of red, orange and yellow. Some strains fruit more heavily than others. The plant produces yellow flowers, but these are not highly ornamental.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Berberis thunbergii*

**Pronunciation:** BUR-bur-iss thun-BUR-jee-eye

**Common name(s):** Japanese Barberry

**Family:** *Berberidaceae*

**Plant type:** ground cover; shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 4 through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** border; mass planting; ground cover; hedge; edging; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

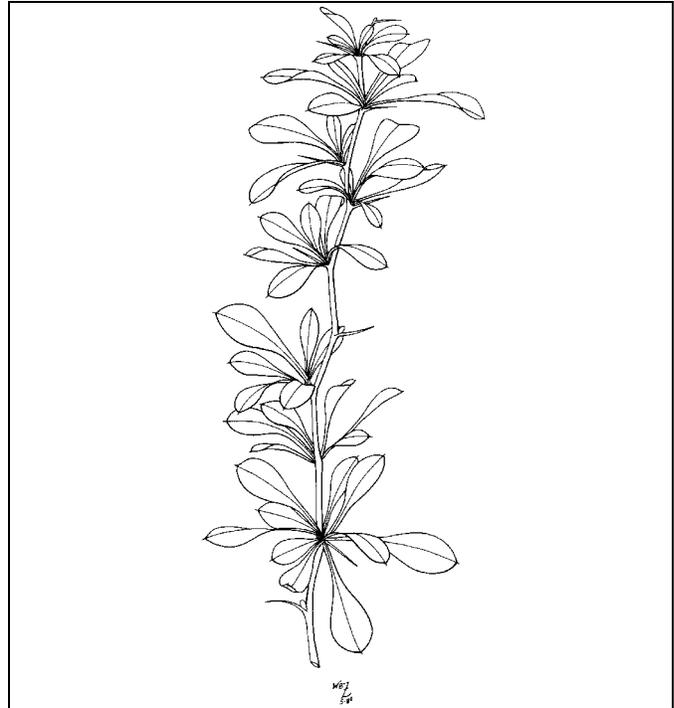


Figure 1. Japanese Barberry.

### Description

**Height:** 2 to 8 feet

**Spread:** 4 to 6 feet

**Plant habit:** round

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** fine

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## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

## Use and Management

Several cultivars are listed: 'Atropurpurea' - reddish foliage; 'Atropurpurea Erecta' - purple leaves, erect habit; 'Atropurpurea Redbird' - better foliage color, leaves larger, more compact habit; 'Aurea' - bright yellow leaves; 'Crimson Pygmy' - a dwarf two feet high and three feet across, with reddish foliage; 'Globe' - globe-shaped, broad; 'Minor' - smaller leaves, fruit and flowers, rounded habit; 'Rose Glow' - new growth pink with red spots; 'Thornless' - no thorns; 'Variegata' - leaves with spots of white, light gray and yellow.

Aphids suck plant juices, and heavy infestations coat the leaves with sticky honeydew. Large aphid populations cause the new growth to be distorted. Aphids can be dislodged by a high pressure water spray from the garden hose.

Scale insects blend in well with the stems and may not be readily noticed. Infestations can be controlled with horticultural oil. The preferred method of control involves regular inspection for early detection of the infestation then spraying with oil.

### Pests and Diseases

Bacterial leaf spots are first small and dark green and appear water soaked. Later the spots turn purplish-brown. Leaf stalks and new growth may also be attacked. Infection of older twigs results in dieback. Prune out and destroy infected twigs. There are fungicides which may take care of the problem.

Anthracnose is sometimes listed as a leaf spot. Symptoms are round, brown spots with reddish margins on the upper leaf surface. Another fungus causes purple spots on the leaves. There are fungicides which may provide some control of these diseases.

Powdery mildews of different genera cause a white coating on the leaves. Plant in full sun in an area with good air circulation to help prevent mildew.

Verticillium wilt causes wilting and eventual death. Nothing can be done but to keep plants healthy by watering and fertilizing. Severely infected plants do not recover.