

Invasive Species Alert

JAPANESE BARBERRY

(BERBERIS THUNBERGII)

ESTABLISHED IN MICHIGAN

IDENTIFICATION:

- Spiny, deciduous shrub usually 1-2 feet, but can grow up to 6 feet in height.
- Small, oval-shaped green leaves with smooth edges turn red in the fall.
- Brown to reddish stems with thorns at each node.
- Small, pale-yellow flowers with six petals hang from stems, blooming in spring.
- Fruits are small, bright red, egg-shaped berries that persist into winter.
- Can be mistaken for the native American barberry, which has toothed leaves.



HABITAT: Japanese barberry tolerates a wide range of soils and moisture conditions and can thrive in sun or shade. It is often found in forests, fields and along woodland edges, roadsides and disturbed areas.

NATIVE RANGE: Japan.



U.S. DISTRIBUTION: Introduced throughout the northeast and Midwest United States, south to Georgia and also in Washington.

MICHIGAN DISTRIBUTION: Established and widespread in Michigan.

LOCAL CONCERN: This common ornamental plant can easily escape cultivation. Its seeds are dispersed by birds and wildlife. Plants are not browsed by livestock or wildlife due to thorns, giving it a competitive advantage over native plants. Shrubs form dense stands that displace native species, providing the perfect habitat for black-legged ticks that can carry Lyme disease. Japanese barberry can raise pH levels in soil.

REPORT THIS SPECIES: Visit [MISIN.MSU.edu](https://www.misin.msu.edu) or download the MISIN smartphone app and report it from your phone.

Photos courtesy of John Ruter, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org (top) and Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org (bottom).