



SAFETY MESSAGE



Provided by the UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee



Japanese Barberry: A Prickly Problem

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Introduction

Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is a non-native invasive shrub originally introduced from Japan and widely planted as an ornamental for its compact form, colorful foliage, small yellow flowers, and red berries. Many landscape varieties have been sold, including green, purple, red, gold, and dwarf cultivars, which can make the plant look different from site to site. Despite its ornamental history, Japanese Barberry can escape cultivation and become a persistent management concern because of its sharp spines, dense branching, abundant fruit, and ability to establish under a range of site conditions.

Safety Risks and Recommended PPE

Safety Risk: Japanese barberry has sharp spines and dense branching that can cause scratches, punctures, and snagging hazards. Dense stands may also hide uneven ground, debris, ticks, and other worksite hazards.

Worker Exposure: Exposure is most likely when walking through, cutting, pulling, mowing, or spraying dense growth. Japanese barberry stands can also create humid conditions that support blacklegged ticks, which may carry the pathogen that causes Lyme disease.

Work Precautions: Use caution when moving through dense thickets, and avoid pushing through growth where visibility is limited. Check for ticks after working in infested areas.

Spread/Contamination Prevention: Avoid moving berries, seeds, soil, or plant fragments to new areas. Clean boots, clothing, tools, mowers, and equipment before leaving the work area.

Recommended PPE: Wear puncture-resistant gloves, long sleeves, long pants, sturdy boots, and wraparound eye protection. Consider gaiters in dense stands. Use a face shield when mowing or cutting may propel spines or debris, plus all task-specific PPE.



Safety Glasses



Long Pants



Long Sleeves



Gloves



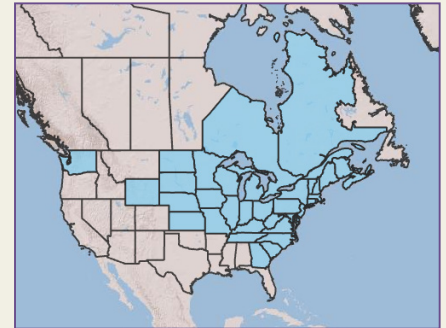
Boots



Face Shield or Respirator

Range and Distribution Map

Japanese Barberry is widely established in the eastern and northeastern United States, the Midwest, and parts of Canada, with scattered populations in other regions. It is most common in forests, woodland edges, roadsides, old fields, pastures, fencerows, rights-of-way, and disturbed sites. Birds and other wildlife spread the berries, while deer often avoid browsing the thorny shrub, giving it a competitive advantage over native plants.



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References/Works Cited

Penn State Extension [Japanese Barberry](#)

University of Maryland Extension [Invasive in Your Woodland: Japanese Barberry](#)

USDA Forest Service FEIS [Berberis thunbergii](#)

National Invasive Species Information Center [Japanese Barberry](#)

Scan the QR code for additional guidance on identification and control.

