

EUROPEAN BARBERRY

Berberis vulgaris

Status in Maine: localized



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Description: Deciduous shrub growing to 10' tall and 6' wide. **Leaves:** Oval, small ($\frac{3}{4}$ " wide to 2" long), with serrate margins. Occur in clusters. **Flowers/seeds:** Bright yellow $\frac{1}{3}$ " wide flowers grow in striking dangling racemes. Fruit are red-to purple-tinged, oblong berries each containing 1-3 black seeds. European barberry is an alternate host for wheat rust (*Puccinia graminis*), a fungal pest of wheat crops. **Stems:** Large (~1"), 2-3-parted, sharp spines at the nodes, and gray bark with bright yellow wood.

Native range: Asia. **How arrived in U.S.:** Settlers brought it for jams, dyes, and hedges.

Reproduction: By seed and vegetatively; plants produce large numbers of berries that are dispersed by birds and other wildlife. Seeds have high germination rates. Vegetative expansion is through rooting stems and suckering. Long arching stems can take root where they touch soil.

Habitat: Forests, woodlands, shrub thickets, old fields, coastal grasslands, and fencerows. Prefers full sun to part shade.

Similar native species: None.

Similar non-native species: Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) has smaller, entire leaves and shorter, single spines at each node. See description in this guide.

Control methods: Small plants and seedlings may be pulled up by the roots when soil is moist (wear gloves!); larger plants can be cut, but re-sprouting will occur. Persistent cutting or mowing multiple times during the growing season over several years may kill the plant, but



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diligence is required. Mowing can prevent seedlings from establishing. Flame-weeder (propane torch) can be effective if used in spring and followed-up during the summer to treat survivors. Herbicides are effective as foliar applications (glyphosate solution) or cut-stump applications (glyphosate or triclopyr solution applied immediately after cutting except in early spring). Barberry is one of the first plants to green up in the spring. Early foliar applications of triclopyr can be effective if applied prior to the leaf-out of surrounding native plants.

