

Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* var. *atropurpurea*)

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Summary:

Foliage: Deciduous broadleaf

Height: 3 to 8 feet (depending on cultivar)

Spread: 4 to 7 feet (depending on cultivar)

Shape: Upright mound

This medium to large shrub has purple foliage throughout the growing season. Japanese barberry has thorns which may be an advantage (deer proof, pedestrian traffic control) or a liability (injury to pedestrians).

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Resources and the Virginia Native Plant Society have ranked this as a "moderately invasive species" in the mountain, piedmont, and coastal areas of Virginia.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 5 to 8

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Wet, moist, to dry

Soil Type: Sandy, loam, or clay

pH Range: 3.7 to 7.0

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include massing, border, and hedge.

Planting Notes:

Very adaptable, tolerating dry conditions and urban conditions better than many other shrubs.

Care:

Easy to maintain.

Tolerates severe pruning or shearing; for that reason, it has been extensively used as a hedge species.

Problems:

No serious problems.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta, regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Berberis thunbergii*:

'Aurea' has yellow leaves and dense, slow growth.

'Bagatelle' is more dwarf and compact than 'Crimson Pygmy'

'Sparkle' has arching branches, red-orange fall color.

'Crimson Pygmy' is a dense dwarf mounded thorny medium form of the species with purple foliage color throughout the growing season. Plants produce bright red berries in the fall.

'Rose Glow' has new foliage that is pinkish mottled with purple splotches; foliage color will be all purple later in season.

Related species that have not shown invasive tendencies:

Wintergreen Barberry (*Berberis julianae*) is an upright evergreen shrub that grows to about 8 feet tall and 7 feet wide. It has large leaves and thorny twigs.

Warty barberry (*Berberis verruculosa*) is an evergreen medium shrub with a dense mounded form with small leaves and thorny branches.

Mentor barberry (*Berberis x mentorensis*) is a deciduous (may be somewhat evergreen in the warmer zones of Virginia) upright shrub that grows to about 8 feet tall. It naturally has a dense habit with thorny stems which make it an ideal candidate for a hedge and barrier plant.

Comments:

Japanese barberry is tolerant of pruning and poor sites.

This species has been widely used as a hedge or barrier plant because of its thorny twigs which also imparts deer resistance. [The Virginia Department of Conservation and Resources and the Virginia Native Plant Society have ranked this as a “moderately invasive species” in the mountain, piedmont, and coastal areas of Virginia.](#) The sale and use of this species has been banned in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

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