

## Invasive Plan of the Month- Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)

### *Three reasons not to landscape with barberry — and how to get rid of it*

When the forsythia starts blooming in spring, that light green haze you see low in the woods is likely Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*).

Our woods are full of it!



That is Reason #1 not to use barberry in your home landscape. Each shrub produces thousands of berries every year. Birds and other creatures eat the berries and then disperse the seeds.

These plants can easily take over the understory of a forest in a few years, where it will grow in dense mats. By out-competing native plants, crowding out sunlight, and changing soil chemistry, this invader creates new colonies that allow for continued spread.

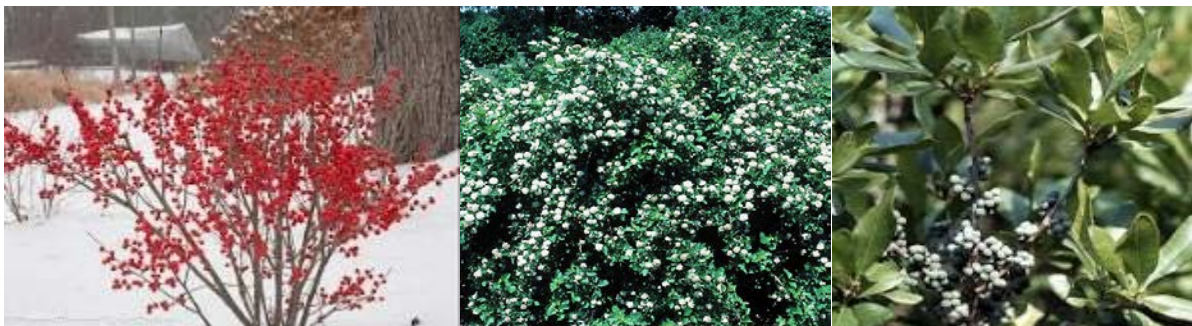


Reason #2 is that recent research has found that ticks love barberry! Deer ticks, the kind that carry Lyme disease, are found at higher densities in barberry patches than in other habitats.

And, although some nurseries sell cultivars of barberry that are supposedly sterile, and will not spread, ticks are not choosy and will happily take up residence in so-called sterile plants.



Reason #3 not to plant barberry — we have many more attractive native shrubs! A few examples are our own native bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), ink-berry (*Ilex glabra*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), arrow-wood (*Viburnum dentatum*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) and hearts-a-bustin' (*Euonymus americana*). Good local garden centers can order them for you. And most can be purchased at BWA's annual [Native Plant sale](#).



Barberry is banned in New York and most New England states, and Connecticut nurseries have voluntarily stopped selling it. But it's still sold at big box stores and by some nurseries in Pennsylvania. Landscapers like it because it's cheap and deer tend to avoid it.

So if you have barberry in your garden, spring is a good time to start to control it, before its characteristic red berries show up.

Cut the stems as close to the ground as possible. You can paint the stumps with herbicide (ask your garden center for recommendations). These are persistent plants, so plan to lop off or spray any regrowth when it is very young, as soon as you see it. A couple of years of *your* persistence in this treatment should be sufficient.

If you wait till fall, you must dig it out roots and all, being careful not to spread the seeds. Bag the plant and put it in the garbage. Don't compost it because it will root and take over in your compost pile!

Even a small amount of root left in the ground is enough to help the plant re-grow – it's best to pull plants out when the soil is damp and soft. If you can't pull them out, and you can't wait till spring, cut plants in late summer, before the seed matures. For large infestations, you may have to combine mechanical removal with a weed killer such as Roundup.

Late last spring, a local gardener cut back and grubbed out several patches of non-native invasives including barberry. It's all filled in now with black-eyed Susans, Queen Anne's Lace and phlox – a big improvement!