



Barberry: *Berberis thunbergii*, *B. vulgaris*, *B. canadensis*

Folk names

"Don't think about non-native plants as horrible plants. They are just growing here too. None of the invasive plants do anything near the scale as to what we do, we shouldn't be so down on them. But it is nice when you have an aggressive plant like Barberry that you can collect without a lot of ecological destruction."—Jim McDonald

Overview and Identification: The Eastern US has several barberries: the native North American Barberry (*Berberis canadensis*) which is now quite rare; Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), and the European barberry (*B. vulgaris*) which is commonly planted as an ornamental. Most of the barberry you will encounter in the wilds is Japanese Barberry or European barberry, both of which are listed on invasive species lists throughout the mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and northeast regions. Japanese Barberry takes over the understory of forests that have been thinned or damaged by human disruption and can quickly outcompete native vegetation. Barberry can tolerate full shade to full sun. The leaves are green and will turn red as we approach fall. Distinguishing features between the barberries are as follows:



1 *B. Canadensis* (native barberry)

Japanese Barberry	European/Common Barberry	American Native Barberry
Single thorns coming out of all branches	Triple- or multiple- branched thorns coming out of all branches; less than American	Many thorns, triple-branched thorns
Single flowers or berries hanging in a line*	Clusters of 10-20 flowers or berries*	Clusters of 2-5 flowers*
Smooth leaves that are shaped like fat exclamation points	Oval, Toothed leaves	Elliptical to oblanceolate, smooth or slightly toothed, no more than 10 teeth per leaf
Shorter shrub (3-6 feet)	Taller shrub (up to 10')	Shorter shrub 3-6 feet

Harvest: Japanese Barberry can be abundantly harvested anywhere at any time, and harvesting this plant will support the ecosystem. For medicine, harvest both the lower branches and the roots. The branches are easier to harvest, especially on older shrubs. For medicine, you will want to only use the roots and lower branches that are bright yellow (yellow is the Berberine). The berries are edible (even when dried into late winter) and the leaves can also be a trailside nibble.

Herbalism Overview

- **Taste:** Bitter
- **Herbal Actions:** Astringent, Anti-microbial: Barberry is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-parasitic; antioxidant, detoxifying, immunostimulant, anti-cancer, cholagogue
- **Organ and System Affinities:** Digestive, Urinary, Cardiovascular
- **Addressing tissue states:**

One of the things you will notice about Barberry is the rugged, strong and spiky nature of Barberry—ready for a fight, to dig in deep, and to protect. These are the qualities we can seek in a plant for medicine to fight tough infections—which is just what Barberry does!

Uses: Berberine is the yellow color you see in the barberry's lower branches and roots; the more yellow the higher amount of berberine and the better the medicine. Japanese Barberry is an *excellent substitute* for the UPS at risk species Goldenseal, Goldenthread, or Oregon Grape Root for these plants berberine-rich anti-microbial and bitter features. (Note: If you want to use Goldenseal for the mucus membrane Trophorestorative properties, you can use Yerba Mansa).

Fighting Infection: Japanese Barberry (and many other barberries) contain high amounts of **berberine** which is an outstanding anti-microbial that works when it can come in direct contact with tissues (this may be for skin, GI, urinary, kidneys, etc). Basically, anywhere that the barberry can touch it can fight infection including in the mouth, skin, GI system, and urinary system. This includes specific uses for:

- **Stomach Ulcers and other gut infections:** Japanese Barberry is extremely effective at fighting stomach ulcers; it helps heal the ulcer and also kills the h-pylori bacterial that causes the ulcer. Barberry can also fight and heal other kinds of GI infections where you need a strong anti-microbial.
- **Canker Sores and mouth ulcers:** Barberry is very good for this; you can gargle and add a demulcent herb like violet leaf or marshmallow.
- **Yeast Infections:** Yeast infections are caused by the Candida fungus; you can use Barberry topically as a liniment or soak for fighting these infections (I recommend using it both internally and externally for this purpose).
- **Urinary track infections:** My favorite remedy for a UTI is a tincture or tea of Barberry (to fight infection), Goldenrod (gentle anti-inflammatory), willow or black birch (pain relief), and yarrow (if there is blood present). For burning sensations, you can also soak in a strong tea of barberry down there.
- **Lyme Disease:** Japanese Barberry, combined with Japanese Knotweed, is a powerful remedy to fight Lyme disease. The antimicrobial nature

Antibiotic support: Berberine containing plants like Japanese Barberry are great to take when you are taking antibiotics as they help inhibit bacterial resistance (specifically through inhibiting bacteria's MDR (multi-drug resistance) pumps).

Detoxifying and Liver support: Berberine has been demonstrated to help support the liver with detoxification of the body, including detoxification from the buildup of heavy metals, pathogens, and pharmaceuticals. Barberry is used to stimulate bile secretions, increase the flow of bile, and discharge of bile into the small intestine, which breaks up stagnant liver conditions. Because of this, Barberry has been used to treat various liver diseases, including Jaundice and cirrhosis is also indicated when skin eruptions may be caused by a buildup of toxins that the liver cannot flush out. Finally, Barberry can protect the liver from the damage of taking large amounts of acetaminophen.

Cancer: Barberry has been used, particularly in TCM, to treat a wide range of cancers including liver, neck, or stomach and is increasingly included in western cancer treatment formulas. This is because Berberine has been demonstrated to support white blood cells when they are overloaded with conventional cancer treatments (chemo, radiation) and also to fight free radicals and inhibit the growth of cancer cells.

Withdrawal and Drug Addiction. For those who are working to withdraw and get clean from opiates, berberine can assist individuals in clearing the drugs from their body and aid on their path to recovery.

Preparation and Use

Parts Used: Lower branches, roots

Preparation: Tincture, tea. Tea is VERY bitter and is not palatable by all people. Tincture 10-30 drops.

Contraindications: Contraindicated during pregnancy. High doses may impact Vitamin B processing in the body. Berberine may block the effects of the drug Cyclophosphamide. Do not use with the Licorice plant (*Glycyrrhiza* spp) as Licorice nullifies the effects of Berberine.

Other uses:

- **Orange-Yellow Dye:** The roots (boiled in lye) and young leaves have been used to create a natural dye.
- **Leaves as food:** Young leaves can be eaten fresh or added to salads.
- **Berries as food:** Berries are nutrient dense and contain pectin. As such, they have been used to make liquors, jams, preserves and sauces traditionally in Europe.