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Berberis julianae: Wintergreen Barberry[1]

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Introduction

Wintergreen barberry is a rapidly growing perennial shrub that reaches a height of 10 feet and spread of 8 feet (Figures 1 and 2). It is ideal for use as an almost impenetrable hedge or barrier planting, with its dense branching growth habit, spiny leaves up to three inches long, and the three-parted spines located along the stiff stems (Figures 3 and 4). It is also one of the hardiest evergreen barberries. The leaves of wintergreen barberry may turn wine-red or purplish-bronze in the winter (Figure 5). Clusters of small, lemon-yellow blooms appear in late spring for 1 to 2 weeks and may occasionally have an unpleasant fragrance (Figure 6). Clusters of blue-black berries follow the flowers and persist on the plant (Figure 7). Fairly upright but more rounded with age, wintergreen barberry also works well in mixed shrubbery borders or as a foundation planting. Grouping three plants together in a shrubbery border makes for a nice contrasting textural effect.



Figure 1. Full form—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
Credit: © Carlos Muñoz-Amezcua, some rights reserved (CC BY) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Full form, manicured—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.



Figure 3. Leaf—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
Credit: © Wolfgang Bacher, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Stem—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
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Figure 5. Leaf, fall color—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
Credit: © Benigno Veraz, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 6. Flower—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
Credit: © David Hocken, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 7. Fruit—*Berberis julianae*: wintergreen barberry.
Credit: © Mariia N. Kuznetsova, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist

General Information

Scientific name: *Berberis julianae*

Pronunciation: BUR-bur-iss jool-ee-AN-ee

Common name(s): wintergreen barberry

Family: *Berberidaceae*

Plant type: shrub; perennial

USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 8B (Figures 8 and 9)

USDA Hardiness Zones 6A-8B

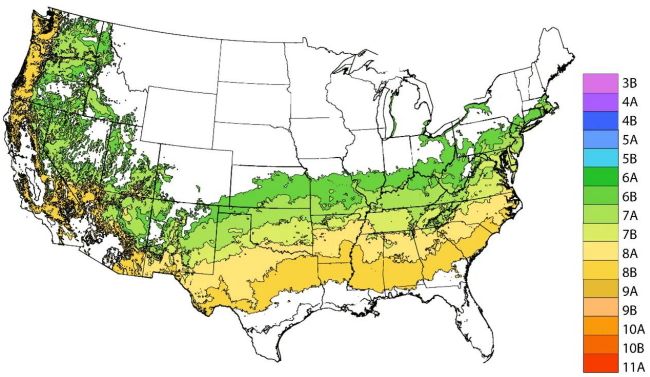


Figure 8. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 6A–8B.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zone 7B-8B

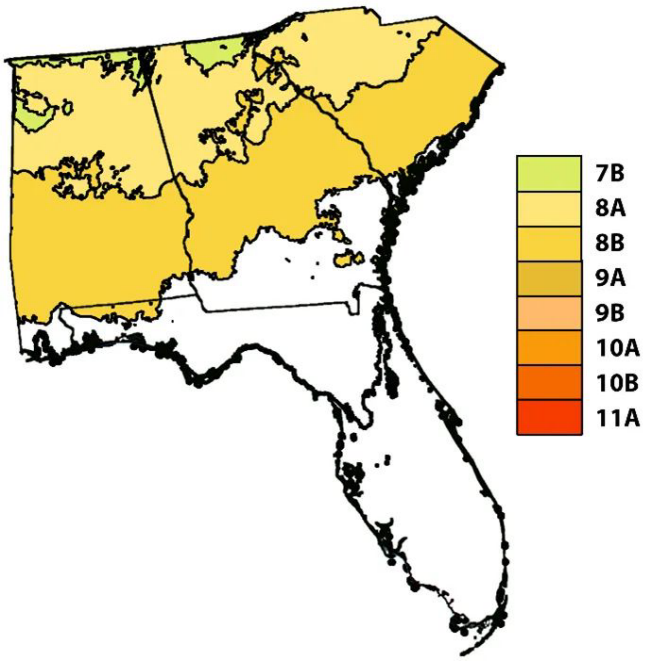


Figure 9. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 7B–8B.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

Planting month for zone 8: year-round

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Origin: native to temperate Asia

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years); may be considered invasive in other parts of North America

Uses: hedge; border; screen; shrubbery border; foundation plant

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 6 to 10 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: vase shape; round; upright

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: rapid

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: spiny

Leaf shape: lanceolate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: fragrant; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green; new growth red on certain cultivars

Fall color: red

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: less than 1/2 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: blue; black

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; attracts birds; attracts pollinators

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; thorns present

Current year stem/twig color: yellow

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun; plant grows in partial shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; loam; clay; sand; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to evergreen foliage and persistent fruit

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Wintergreen barberry is adaptable to a wide range of soil conditions but looks best when grown on rich, somewhat moist soil in full sun or light shifting shade. Plants will require some pruning to maintain their best form. In time, the center of the plant becomes thick with dead and living stems massed together in a thicket. Remove the dead stems and thin the living stems to allow more light to reach the interior of the plant. Wear heavy gloves and a long-sleeved shirt when pruning this plant, as it has spines.

Propagation is by semi-hardwood cuttings rooted under mist.

Cultivars Include

'Nana', having a compact growth habit 4 feet in height, dark green foliage becomes wine red in winter, may be difficult to source commercially; Compactum', reaching a height of 5 feet; Spring Glory', having red new growth. *Berberis gagnepainii* is a related species that is wider and has pendulous branches.

Design Considerations

Given its rapid, dense growth and the presence of sharp spines, wintergreen barberry is an outstanding choice for creating a functional hedge or an impenetrable barrier. It serves as an effective low-maintenance screen for privacy and security, and is particularly valuable in landscapes where deer browsing is a concern. It also performs well as a structural shrub in a mixed border or as a foundation plant against a building. Winter barberry is exceptionally resilient, showing high tolerance for both drought and salt, which makes it a reliable option for challenging sites like coastal areas or roadside plantings. However, thoughtful placement is critical due to its thorns. To prevent injury, locate it away from walkways, patios, and children's play areas where people might accidentally brush against it. To soften the barberry's appearance and create a dynamic garden scene, pair it with plants that offer contrasting colors, forms, and textures. Muhly grass with its fall-blooming soft, airy pink plumes provides a stunning

textural contrast to the barberry's rigid and dense structure. Coontie is a tough Florida native plant, that offers a bold, sculptural texture that creates an attractive, low-maintenance layer in front of or beside the barberry.

Pests and Diseases

No pests of major concern or diseases of major concern.

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