

Berberidaceae

Barberry Family

Mostly Asian in distribution, this family is closely allied with the buttercups. Of the 650 species in 13 genera, NS has only three genera and four species.

Perfect flowers are regular in form and hypogynous. Sepals 4–6 and sometimes petaloid, they are usually deciduous. Petals when present are half as many or equal to the number of stamens. Both shrubs and herbs are found here, the woody species have alternate leaves and simple thorns. Fruits are berries in all species.

Key to genera

- A. Shrubs with spines; berries red. *Berberis*
- aa. Perennial herbs; berries blue or yellow. B
 - B. Leaves in a terminal whorl, deeply cleft and radially lobed; flowers solitary, white; to 5cm across; fruit 4–5cm long; yellowish. *Podophyllum*
 - bb. Leaves 2–3 times ternate; terminal leaflets trilobed; flowers several, greenish purple, <1cm wide; fruit blue. *Caulophyllum*

***Berberis* L**

Barberries

Barberries are shrubs, with simple thorns arising from the leaf nodes. Bark is yellow. Inflorescence an umbel or raceme; flowers yellow. Petals and stamens are six-merous, arranged around a single pistil.

Key to species

- A. Thorns solitary; berries clustered; leaves entire. *Berberis thunbergii*
- aa. Thorns in threes; berries in pendent racemes; leaves sharply toothed. *B. vulgaris*

***Berberis thunbergii* DC**

Japanese Barberry; épine-vinette du Japon



Photo by Sean Blaney

A thorny shrub, it has small obovate leaves. Their margins are entire.

Flowers early, April and May.

Formerly planted as an ornamental and still seen as an escape. Spreading from cultivation to pastures, forest edges and other open land.

Collected around the coast from Halifax to Wolfville and also at Cape Split.

Introduced from Japan and found throughout the continent.



Photo by Alain Belliveau

***Berberis vulgaris* L.**

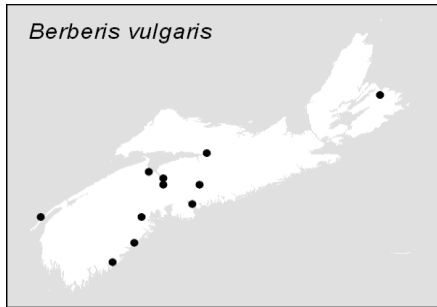
Common Barberry; épine-vinette commune



Photo by Martin Thomas

Branches are heavily armed with short thorns, three per node. This shrub has thick oval leaves which are sharply toothed. Racemes hang on pedicels from the leaf nodes. Fruits about 1cm in length.

Flowers May and June.



Berberis vulgaris

Thickets and fields.

Collections mostly from west of Halifax and Truro. It is also found at Sydney, Cape Breton.

Another widely introduced species, although not often planted anymore.

***Caulophyllum* Michx.**

Blue Cohosh

Only two species comprise this genus, the other is limited to Asia. Flowers emerge from bare stems very early spring simultaneously with leaf-out. Leaves are compound: leaflets three, lobed in threes. Sepals, petals and stamens are six-merous. The single ovary produces two seeds. Seeds are large and fleshy-coated, resembling fruits, glaucous-green becoming blue at maturity. Although the leaves resemble those of *Thalictrum* or *Aquilegia*, *Caulophyllum* is generally glaucous, while the others are not.

***Caulophyllum thalictroides* (L.) Michx.**

Blue Cohosh; caulophylle faux-pigamon



Photo by Sean Blaney

Flowers are purplish-brown forming fruit that quickly turning blue. Peduncle bears a single sessile. Inflorescence may be subtended by a smaller leaf. Entire plant appears glaucous or bluish-green.

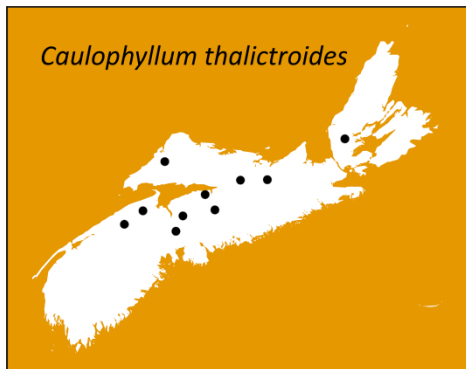
One of our earliest wildflowers, appearing in April, until beginning of June.

Shade-tolerant, restricted to river floodplain deciduous forests.

A wide and patchy distribution over northern portion of the province from Annapolis River to River Denys in Cape Breton.

NS to MB, south to OK, AL and GA.

STATUS: ORANGE-listed for NS.



Podophyllum L.

May-apple, Mandrake

Ten species comprise the genus; all are poisonous. A single species has been occasionally collected in NS. Colonial, the plants have whorled leaves, which are radially divided. Peduncle bears a single pair of leaves. Flowers have 6–9 petals, 12–18 stamens, the sessile stigma and ovary both solitary. Fruit is a berry with many seeds.

Podophyllum peltatum L.

May-apple, Mandrake; podophylle pelté



Photo by Beth Cameron

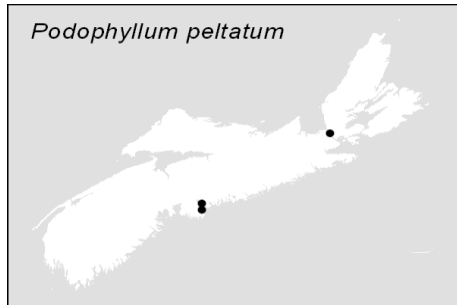
The large basal leaves may be up to 40cm across. Cauline leaves are usually smaller. Berry is large with rows of seeds. Forms large colonies of robust plants and once established, can rapidly spread.

Flowers in early June.

Forests, thickets, fields and pastures.



Photo by Beth Cameron



Reports of localities are not borne up by collections, which include Halifax, Sydney River area and Mulgrave or Port Hawkesbury. With no recent reports, this species may well be extirpated or at best considered as historical occurrences.

Elsewhere NS to ON, south to FL and TX. Introduced to NS.