



Invasive Plant Alert¹

Leatherleaf Mahonia *Mahonia bealei* (Fortune) Carrière

This evergreen, clonal shrub is widely planted as an ornamental, and land managers increasingly find it in woodlands. It is sometimes called leatherleaf holly.

Where to Look

This species is native to China, Japan and Taiwan. It has been found from Maryland south to Florida. Leatherleaf mahonia is usually found in open woodlands. It is shade tolerant, but will also grow in full sun. It is also drought-tolerant. Little information is available about the potential for ecological damage.

It has been reported from natural areas in Charles County, Montgomery County and Prince George's County, MD and in Fairfax County, VA. It has been found in Rock Creek Park and Wolf Trap Park.



Figure 1 *Mahonia bealei* shrub. Nancy Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org

Identifying the Plant

This evergreen shrub begins to flower in late winter through early spring. Several spikes of yellow,

fragrant flowers grow from the branch tips. Each flower is about ¼ in. across. The flowers are pollinated by insects.



Figure 2 Leatherleaf mahonia fruit cluster. Nancy Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org

Stiff, upright, un-branched stems grow from the base of the plant and the leaves are held horizontally. The compound leaves have 9 - 15 thick, shiny leaflets. Each leaflet resembles a holly leaf with several sharp points. Leaflets may be yellow-green or reddish depending on soil chemistry. The leaf petiole is often red in color. The entire leaf grows to be 6 - 12 inches long.



Figure 1 Leatherleaf mahonia flowers. Nancy Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org

Clusters of fruits start out green and mature to deep blue. The fruits are covered with a waxy coating giving the fruit a powdery

blue appearance. Fruits are rapidly eaten by birds. The bark on mature plants is light grey and becomes deeply furrowed. The inner bark is yellow.

Leatherleaf mahonia is in the barberry family. It closely resembles Oregon grape, *Mahonia aquifolium*, native to the Pacific Northwest. Oregon grape is considered an invasive plant in parts of Europe and has naturalized in the eastern United States and Canada. Oregon grape has 5- 9 leaflets and short flower spikes. The fruits will be in a cluster like a bunch of grapes.

How to get rid of it?

Small shrubs can be pulled or dug out. Larger shrubs can be cut but may resprout. Cut stems can be painted with systemic herbicides.

Resources

Allen, C. R., A. S. Garmestani, J. A. LaBram, A. E. Peck and L. B. Prevost. 2006. When landscaping goes bad: the incipient invasion of *Mahonia bealei* in the southeastern United States. *Biological Invasions* 8(2):169-176.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=nfcwrustaff>

¹ This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region