

# Mahonia

*Mahonia aquifolium*, *Mahonia japonica*,  
*Mahonia lomariifolia*, *Mahonia bealei*

**Family** Berberidaceae (barberry)



## Identification

- Four species known to be growing in the wild in New Zealand.
- Shrubs with upright stems or branches.
- Leaves clustered at the end of stems.
- Leaves are made up of many leathery, spiny leaflets.
- Yellow flowers are held on long flowerheads.
- Blue berries follow flowering.



*Mahonia lomariifolia*. Photo: D. Mahon (DOC).



*M. lomariifolia* leaves and fruit. Photos: D. Mahon (DOC).

## Where is it found?

*Mahonia* can be found growing in native and exotic forests, forest margins and shrublands. It is most likely to be found near gardens or historic sites.

## Why is it a problem?

*M. aquifolium* and *M. bealei* are recognised as ecological weed pests in other countries. *M. lomariifolia* is showing invasive tendencies in Christchurch. *Mahonia* species produce many seeds, which are bird-dispersed. They are tolerant of shade, a range of climates and different soil types. Some species can also reproduce by suckering. *Mahonia* species often form thickets, which excludes other understory vegetation.

## Status

There are currently no legal requirements to control *Mahonia* species in Canterbury.

Acting now could help prevent these species from becoming pest plants in the future.

We are interested in gauging the extent of *Mahonia* growing wild in Canterbury. Please report sightings of *Mahonia* if found growing in the wild (not in gardens) to [weeds@ecan.govt.nz](mailto:weeds@ecan.govt.nz).

For more information on the four *Mahonia* species known to be growing wild in New Zealand, please refer to the back of this fact sheet.



*M. lomariifolia* growing wild at Horseshoe Lake. Photo: D. Mahon (DOC).



[www.weedbusters.org.nz](http://www.weedbusters.org.nz)

## Further information on the four known *Mahonia* species growing wild in New Zealand

### *Mahonia aquifolium* (Oregon grape, Oregon grape holly or holly-leaved barberry)

A shrub up to 2 m tall with few branches, but often with many upright stems. Each leaf is made up of 2–7 pairs (usually 3–4 pairs) of shiny, dark green, spiny leaflets, which resemble holly leaves. Flowers appear in spring (September to November) and are followed by berries in summer. (No photo available).

### *Mahonia lomariifolia* (Chinese hollygrape or Burmese mahonia)

Has been found at Travis Wetland and Horseshoe Lake Reserve. Can grow up to 4 m tall with many single or upright stems. Each leaf is made up of 14–21 pairs of long, narrow leaflets. Flowers in winter.



*Mahonia lomariifolia*. Photo: D. Mahon (DOC)

### *Mahonia japonica* (Japanese mahonia)

This species can be distinguished by its larger, more tree-like growth form (up to 3 m tall), with few stems. Each leaf is made up of 5–9 pairs of leaflets. Flowers from March to August. (No photo available).

### *Mahonia bealei* (leatherleaf mahonia)

Can be found growing wild in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. Can grow up to 2 m tall with many spreading/upright stems. Each leaf is usually made up of 4–6 pairs of leaflets, similar to *M. aquifolium*. The leaflets are dull grayish blue/green above and pale yellow/green below. Flowers late winter - early spring.



*Mahonia bealei* in flower. Photos: A. Paltridge (DOC)