

Leatherleaf Mahonia

AN INVASIVE TO KNOW

CHRISTIAN SNEAD

Originally from China, Leatherleaf Mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*) was introduced as an ornamental plant in the 1800s. While valued for its unique evergreen foliage and winter blooms, this shrub has spread across southeastern forests, outcompeting native species. It's now considered invasive in Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Maryland, and Virginia.

Leatherleaf Mahonia can grow in deep shade and form dense thickets, reaching between five and ten feet tall. Its stiff, spiny leaflets resemble holly leaves and grow in a feather-like pattern along the stem, with a single, larger leaflet at the tip. In late winter, the plant produces fragrant yellow flowers, followed by grape-like clusters of bluish-black berries. Birds and other wildlife consume these berries, spreading Mahonia's seeds far and wide. In addition to seed dispersal, the plant spreads by sending up new shoots from its base.

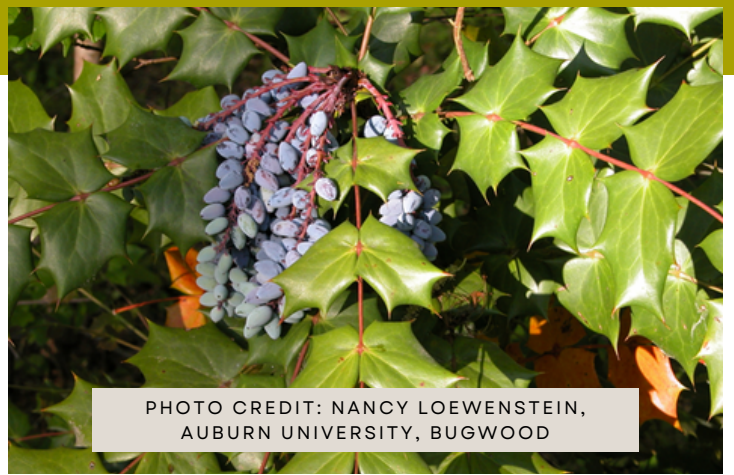


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Removing Leatherleaf Mahonia can be a challenge, but persistence pays off. Because of its sharp leaves, gloves and protective clothing are recommended. The most effective method is cutting the stem as close to the ground as possible—ideally within an inch—and immediately treating the stump with a high-concentration glyphosate herbicide. For those wishing to avoid herbicides, repeated cutting of new growth will eventually weaken and kill the plant, though it may take multiple treatments. If possible, uprooting the entire plant, including its deep taproot, is the best way to ensure it doesn't grow back.

Every Mahonia removed helps protect our local ecosystems. If you're tackling this invasive species in your yard and looking for native alternatives, try wax myrtle, American holly or American beautyberry.



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