

Plant of the Week

Mahonia spp

Kingdom: [Plantae](#) Division: [Magnoliophyta](#) Class: [Magnoliopsida](#) Order: [Ranunculales](#) Family: [Berberidaceae](#) Genus: [Mahonia](#)

Mahonia is a genus of ~ 70 species, mostly evergreen shrubs with a strong Northern Hemisphere distribution. The genus *Mahonia* is included in the *Berberidaceae* and is closely related to the genus *Berberis*.¹ The relationship is so close that inter generic hybrids have been reported and leads inevitably to the suggestion that the two genera should be combined. I have not so far been able locate any molecular data that might bear on this question but it cannot be far away!



The featured plant is from the Biology Courtyard garden on the North side underneath the Japanese Maple and as the latter loses its leaves, the true value of *Mahonia* as a winter-flowering shrub will be appreciated. Our plant was one of the earlier plantings in the bed representing typical Dicotyledons and its identity is uncertain. It has features of both *M. japonica* and *M. lomariifolia* and may well be one of the commercially available hybrids between these two species.²



One of best known Mahonias is *M. aquifolium* (“Oregon Grape” or “Holly Leaved Barberry”) from N. America. This plant, as do most other Mahonias, has edible fruit which is made into jam and preserves. It is also well known as a folk remedy for many complaints of the skin, especially psoriasis. These claims have been verified in modern clinical trials.³ More extreme (and unverified) claims have been made for extracts of *M. japonica* ‘....The roots and stems are antirheumatic, antitussive, depurative, expectorant and febrifuge. A decoction is used in the treatment of bone-breaking fevers, dizziness and tinnitus, backache, weak knees, dysentery and enteritis.’⁴

1) Wikipedia

2) <http://pediaview.com/openpedia/Mahonia> media

3) Gulliver, W.P. and Donsky, H.J. (2005) Am. J. Ther. 12: 398-406

4) <http://www.naturalmedicinalherbs.net/herbs/m/mahonia-japonica.php>