

***Berberis vulgaris* from seed - advice from experienced Barberry growers**



Method 1 – Lifeforms Art

I usually dry the berries and then freeze them. Around February 1st I de-frost them, soak them for about 1 hour and then rub them around roughly in a sieve to get the skins off or at least split them. I then mix the seeds up in some compost and sprinkle the mixture evenly onto a deep (200 - 300mm) seed tray. I then sprinkle some compost and grit onto them so they are not obvious to the birds. I keep them off the ground to reduce mouse (& cat) activity and put mesh over to keep birds off. I position the tray so it is shaded until about lunch time and then gets full sun for most of the rest of the day. I think the biggest challenge for seedlings is when the roots reach the bottom of the pot so when roots reach the bottom of the seed tray they will need potting up.

Method 2 – Chester Zoo

- Remove the small seeds from the fruits. Soak in water for up to 12 hours. Viable seeds will sink to the bottom so dispose of those that aren't viable.
- Pat seeds dry and store them in fridge in a sealed and labelled plastic bag at 3 degrees C.
- Sow seeds into sterile pots using peat free compost containing coir and bark. Place compost in pot, gently firm down leaving a 1 cm gap at the top, water well with watering can. Seeds place on top of compost 0.5 cm apart. Cover seeds up by filling to the top of pots with horticultural grit or vermiculite.
- Place pots in cold frame, protect from mice, situated in a northerly direction away from direct sunlight. This technique involves chilling the seeds to mimic the passing of winter and to break down the seed coat. Germination can take 2- 3 months depending on local conditions and whether there is a warm winter or not.
- After 2-3 months the seedlings should have germinated.
- Once the seedlings produce their second set of leaves they are ready to be potted up into a 9cm (small 1 litre) pot using peat free compost. Overfill the pot, make a hole in the centre using a dibber and place the seedling into the pot. Root disturbance should be kept to a minimum, Make sure the first set of leaves are just above the level of the pot so not potted too deep and gently firmed in.
- Once potted up, the seedlings are placed into a cold tunnel in a tray, watered well.
- Keep the plants watered well all summer.
- Once the seedlings' roots have reached the bottom of their pots during the summer, they are ready to be re-potted into their final 2 litre / 15cm pots.

Method 3 – Dorset grower

Allow seeds to dry out and then soak them to remove the fruit from the seed. Don't keep them in the fridge or freezer for the winter but put them straight out into seed trays and let them spend the winter outside. Put a good layer of compost in, place seeds on top and then cover with a layer of compost and grit/sand. Place somewhere facing in a northerly direction for the winter and protect the seed trays from mice and birds.

Method 4 – Westonbirt Arboretum

- Give the seed 3 months cold stratification in the fridge – a clean margarine tub should suffice with just enough damp (not wet) compost to cover the seed.
- The tub should be checked every week to make sure the compost is still damp and any condensation wiped off the inside of the lid.
- Label the tub inside and out and also put on a date when the seed should be removed.
- After the seed has been stratified for the required time, sieve off any excess compost, remove the seed and sow it in a standard seed tray that has been firmed, topped with approx. a 3mm layer of horticultural grade grit.

