

***Kerria japonica*** (L.) A.P. de Candolle  
(*Corchorus japonicus*, *Rubus japonica*, *Spiraea japonica*)

## Japanese Kerria

**Other Common Names:** Japanese Globeflower, Japanese Rose.

**Family:** Rosaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** Plants are useful in USDA zones 5b (5a) to 8 (9a); plants tend to suffer in the mid-summer heat in USDA zones 8 and warmer.

**Foliage:** Simple alternate deciduous leaves are 1½" to 3" (4") long by ¾" to 1½" wide; blades are oblong ovate with doubly serrate margins; the bright green blades are broadly cuneate to rounded at the bases and tips are long acuminate; venation is pinnate and lightly impressed above; petioles are bright green and only ¼" to ½" long; leaves may be shed green or turn a soft yellow in autumn.

**Flower:** Pale to golden yellow terminal solitary perfect flowers can be nearly 2" across and very showy; the five individual waxy appearing ovate petals on the species type slightly overlap in a pinwheel fashion; double flowering forms with numerous petals are more widely available in the trade; flowers have numerous yellow stamens and are subtended by five small ovate green bracts; peak flowering occurs in mid to late spring, with sporadic individual flowers emerging until frost.

**Fruit:** The small single seeded achenes are seldom produced and are not ornamental.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — thin, stiff, glossy, glabrous, zigzag twigs are bright green in color fading with time; Buds — the loose few scaled imbricate glabrous buds are green to brown in color; Bark — bark remains a smooth pale green on older stems for a long time.

**Habit:** Japanese Kerria forms an open irregularly rounded mound, which is typically 4' to 6' (8') tall with an equal or greater spread, consisting of numerous erect to arching branches suckering from the base of the plant; overall plants are fine to medium-fine in texture and can slowly sucker to form small colonies on favorable sites; although somewhat slow to grow initially, branches grow quickly from the base of established plants.

**Cultural Requirements:** *Kerria japonica* is best in our region with afternoon shade, but is suitable for full sun in cooler climates; well drained acidic to neutral soils with consistent moisture and organic matter are needed in hotter climates; periodic pruning is needed to maintain a presentable appearance.

**Pathological Problems:** Few disease or pest problems are of consequence; Japanese beetles will feed on the shrubs if present; twig blights and stem cankers may occasionally be damaging.

**Ornamental Assets:** The golden yellow flowers offer landscape color over an extended period along with bright green foliage and an informal open structure; in cold climates, the bright green deciduous stems can be of interest in winter gardens.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Plants may look pretty ratty after a few years if not subjected to periodic maintenance pruning; high temperatures can limit use in southern locations.

**Landscape Utilization:** Japanese Kerria can add a bit of color to a shrub border or a spring accent to a woodland edge; plants blend better into informal landscapes than those with a more ordered theme; on the northern fringes of their adapted zones, they can be used as a dieback herbaceous perennial or subshrub since bloom occurs on new wood; a dark colored wall helps to make the yellow flowers and green stems stand out.

**Other Comments:** A standard durable component of cooler climate landscapes, *K. japonica* performs better in northern portions of our region than in the south where summers can be too extreme; while 'Pleniflora' tends to dominate the nursery trade, the old-fashion single yellow flowers have a certain Zen quality about them that is appealing; the genus name honors William Kerr, a plant collector and gardener at the Kew Botanic Garden.

**Native Habitat:** This species is native to China and Japan; the specific epithet refers to these Japanese origins.

**Related Taxa:** *Kerria japonica* comes from a monogeneric genus that has at times been included by various scientific authorities in the genera *Rubus* or *Spiraea*; variegated forms have yellow or white edging, but many of these are unstable, often reverting to the green species type; probably the most popular cultivar in the trade is the double flowering form 'Pleniflora' which has bright yellow flowers resembling small roses.

**References:** Dirr, 1998; Flint, 1997; Halfacer and Shawcroft, 1979; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Terrell, 1989.