**Nandina domestica**

Edward F. Gilman

**Introduction**

With bamboo-like stalks and delicate, ferny foliage, Nandina is much-prized for its oriental effect and distinctive appearance (Fig. 1). Adding to its appeal are large, erect panicles of creamy white flowers in spring followed by decorative bright red berries in fall and winter. Berries are eaten by a variety of birds. Nandina spreads slowly by underground stems, providing attractive clumps for entryways, containers, or as specimen plantings in a ground cover. They also add an accent to the front of a shrub border when planted in groups or clumps. Plant on 2 to 3 foot centers for a mass planting, farther for a more open effect.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Nandina domestica
- **Pronunciation:** nan-DEE-nuh doe-MESS-stick-kuh
- **Common name(s):** Nandina, Heavenly Bamboo
- **Family:** Berberidaceae
- **Plant type:** shrub
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 6B through 10 (Fig. 2)
  - **Planting month for zone 7:** year round
  - **Planting month for zone 8:** year round
  - **Planting month for zone 9:** year round
  - **Planting month for zone 10:** year round
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** border; specimen; container or above-ground planter; mass planting; accent; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**Description**

- **Height:** 5 to 8 feet
- **Spread:** 2 to 3 feet
- **Plant habit:** upright
- **Plant density:** open

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: tripinnately compound
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: lanceolate
Leaf venation: pinnate; reticulate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: purple or red
Fall color: red
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: red
Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: reddish
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches
Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: potentially invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Nandina is a low maintenance shrub, requiring only one pruning each year to control plant height, if needed. The tallest canes should be trimmed to the ground or to different heights in early spring to reduce the size. This will provide for more foliage toward the ground and promote a denser plant. Recent selections have produced several dwarf cultivars, described below. Although most of these do not flower and fruit, they do produce vividly-colored fall foliage and can be used as a ground cover. Some are nicer than others.

Nandina grows and flowers well in partial shade but will exhibit richer-colored red fall foliage if planted in the sun. Foliage diseases will be less in full sun. Although tolerant of drought once established, rich soil and ample moisture will produce a lusher, better-looking plant. Plants survive with neglect, although regular fertilization encourages growth and thicker plants.

Dwarf cultivars available include: ‘Atropurpurea Nana’ is a rather ugly, reddish plant; ‘Compacta’, purplish winter color, 4 feet tall; ‘Firepower’, red to maroon fall foliage, 2 feet tall, virus free which gives it superior foliage; ‘Gulfstream’, reddish-bronze fall foliage, 4 feet tall, upright habit, suckers from the base; ‘Harbor Dwarf’, bronze fall foliage, 1.5 to 2 feet tall; ‘Moonbay’ and ‘Nana Purpurea’, both are rounded and spread, and they have red fall foliage and are 1.5 to 2.5 feet tall; and ‘Woods Dwarf’, red to maroon fall foliage, 1.5 feet tall. The dwarf cultivar ‘Lowboy’ flowers and produces red berries, reaches 3 feet in height, and has red fall foliage.

Propagation is by seed or division.

Plants are generally only bothered by scale and mites.

Pests and Diseases

Leaf spot diseases often cause the lower leaves to drop from the plant in the humid regions of the nation. The disease appears to be most severe on plants grown in partial shade where the foliage can remain wet. Plants remain uniformly dense to the ground in the desert southwest.