

# Nandina

## (Heavenly Bamboo)

Standard Nandina (*Nandina domestica*) is a very tough evergreen shrub that has been a staple in southern gardens for over one hundred years. Delicate light-green summer foliage that turns burgundy-red for winter and bright red winter berries account for this long-lasting popularity. In recent years, however, many cultivars of the domestic nandina have gained favor as a result of their tighter and more compact habit. Adaptable to most soil conditions, nandina grow well in either sun or shade, yet require a fair amount of sun to achieve their best winter color. Standard Domestic Nandina and cultivars (varieties) are described in more detail below:

*Nandina domestica* will grow 6-8' tall and about 3' wide and have white flowers that usually appear in May. Its light green foliage usually begins to turn burgundy-red in late September-October and its showy red berries ripen shortly thereafter and persist through spring. (Some pruning of the domestic Nandina is usually necessary to keep plants full and healthy. This is best achieved by thinning out old canes (stems) at the base of the plant and cutting back canes from the top of the plant to various heights.)

'**Compacta**' is a smaller variety of domestic nandina that grows to about 2'-4' tall. This one may not be as graceful as the traditional nandina but usually provides showier winter coloration.

'**Gulfstream**' has become extremely popular among professional designers. Developed by Hines Nursery in Houston, Texas, Gulfstream reaches a moderate size of about 2 ½ to 3 ½' in height with a somewhat upright appearance, has dense foliage, and provides an intense, deep red winter color.

'**Firepower**', said to be a true "dwarf," has larger leaves, a very soft texture, and exhibits the fieriest, glowing red winter color of all the nandinas. Firepower does best when protected from winter winds during establishment and appears to be free of a troublesome foliage-distorting virus. Most textbooks say that Firepower grows to about 1' or 2' high and 2' wide, but we've seen it grow to twice that size.

'**Harbor Belle**' is a New Garden favorite — the best of the 'compact' or 'dwarf' varieties we've seen so far. Reaching 1 ½ to 2' tall and slightly wider, this one is a consistent performer with a deeper burgundy color than 'Firepower' and more frequent (although sporadic) flowers and berries.

'**Sienna Sunrise**' has colorful foliage in spring in shades of red, orange, yellow and bronze. It has a tight, compact habit and grows to 3-4' tall and 2' wide.

'**Royal Princess**' produces more berries than most nandinas, and exhibits very lacy foliage.

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Royal Princess is upright growing to 6-8' tall.

## **PRUNING**

Dwarf or groundcover Nandinas like 'Firepower' and 'Harbor Belle' may need little if any pruning, taller varieties may begin to show bare stems that need removing.

Remove the tallest, oldest canes, or any that lean or cause the overall shape to become irregular and awkward. In addition, if the clump is very thick and the foliage seems crowded, thin out by removing a few of the oldest or thickest canes. Prune the canes out all the way to the ground and don't remove more than 1/3 of the total canes. This will encourage fresh, new stems to sprout with beautiful new foliage. Never shear Nandina as it destroys the soft, informal character of the plant.

In almost every instance you will remove all of the tall bare stems completely and not leave any visible after pruning. The exception would be an old clump of Nandina that has become very sparse with a lot of bare cane showing and no bottom growth. In this case you would remove one-third of the canes in the first year, starting with the tallest or the ones leaning the most. Then prune about one-third of the total canes the next year, and so on. Cutting the tall canes will encourage new growth to sprout from the base the following spring. In three years all of the oldest canes will have been removed, and new growth encouraged.

In recent years, a number of researchers and growing nurseries are paying lots of attention to developing new nandina varieties. We look forward to having these new plants available as soon as possible, and we'll bring them to you as soon as we can get them.



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