

# Nandinas Are Excellent Landscape Plants

*By Dr. William C. Welch  
Landscape Horticulturist, Texas A&M University*



Nandina has been an important landscape plant material in the South for many years. Sometimes known as heavenly bamboo, nandina is known for its ease of culture, attractive red berries and fine textured foliage. A white fruiting nandina is described in Hortus Third but is rarely available in the nursery trade.

Cold damage is extremely rare to established plantings and drought tolerance is as good as that of many native plants. Few diseases or insects attack nandinas which can live for many years even when unattended.

Nandinas are members of the family Berberidaceae and are native evergreens of India and Eastern Asia. Propagation is usually by seed for the common nandina, but the new dwarf cultivars, such as 'nana' and 'Harbor Dwarf', are grown from cuttings or tissue culture since they rarely set seed.

In addition to the fine textured foliage and attractive fruit, nandina foliage often turns a bright red purple during the cold season. The dwarf forms such as 'Harbor Dwarf' or 'Gulf Stream' and 'Royal Princess' are excellent as ground cover plants, since they spread slowly by stolons and eventually form a mass if spaced from 2 to 3 feet apart. Another good use of nandinas is as specimen plants, either in the ground or in containers. They thrive in full sun but also do well in partially shaded areas.

In central Texas, 4 to 5 feet would be typical heights for regular nandinas. 'Harbor Dwarf' grows to about 18 inches as does 'nana.' There is also a compact form ('compacta') which is intermediate in size between the dwarf and larger forms. 'Nana purpurea' is a low growing, highly colored form, which is often more delicate than standard nandinas.

Nandinas are of easy culture, with a wide tolerance to varying soil and moisture conditions. They perform best in well-drained soils and require little added fertility.

## Pruning Nandina Domestica:

Nandina is a low maintenance shrub, requiring pruning only once a year to control its height and keep it from looking leggy. This pruning needs to be done in winter so not to cut off next year berries.

Prune to the ground about 1/3 of the tallest/oldest canes of the nandina domestica. By following this procedure, you will be rewarded with a lush, show-stopping plant that will be a focal point of your landscape. Rarely do the dwarf varieties require any pruning, only occasionally to keep the shape of the plant

Availability of nandinas is good although the dwarf forms are much in demand and relatively expensive. Nandinas are a good choice for low-maintenance landscapes, and are adapted to all areas of Texas.



*This article appeared in the January-February 2002 issue of Horticulture Update, edited by Dr. Douglas F. Welsh, and produced by Extension Horticulture, Texas Cooperative Extension, The Texas A&M University System, College Station, Texas.*