



Nandina (Heavenly Bamboo)

Nandina domestica Thumb.

Family: barberry (*Berberidaceae*)

Common names: heavenly bamboo,
sacred bamboo

Nandina is native to China and Japan. It is not a true bamboo.

Characteristics

Common nandina grows to a height of 6–8 ft, occasionally to 10 ft. It has a clumping pattern of growth with a moderate growth rate and can be maintained at a desired height by pruning the oldest canes.

The canes (stems) are ½–1 inch thick at maturity and have a distinct upright growth pattern. The young canes are red but turn brown as they mature and develop a yellowish coloration after they are cut. The leaves are tri-pinnately compound, dividing into many pointed leaflets 1–2 inches long that create a lacy pattern. New foliage is pinkish and bronze-red as it expands, turning to a rich green or bluish green upon full expansion. At higher elevations, red foliage develops in the fall.

The flower buds are pinkish, opening to a white or creamy white flower in early spring to summer. Individual flowers form 6–12-inch upright panicles at the branch ends. The fruits are shiny red berries that form in the fall. Fruiting is heavier when several plants are in a group.

Landscape use

Nandina grows well in sun or shade and does best at medium to low elevations in Hawaii. It is adaptable to various soils but grows best in rich, well drained, loamy soil with ample water. It may become chlorotic (yellow) in strongly alkaline soils. It tolerates wind, wet con-



ditions, drought, and soil compaction and is moderately tolerant of soil salinity.

Nandina is a tough plant. Because of its clumping habit and moderate rate of growth, it is well suited to containers and small plantings in narrow or restricted areas. Its use can create a light, airy, vertical effect. It serves well as a screen and can be dramatic with night lighting. When properly maintained, nandina plantings will thrive for many decades.

In recent years the use of the common species has declined in favor of a growing list of compact cultivars introduced to Hawaii. The compact nandinias add new color and textures to landscapes that cannot be achieved

by other plants. They are especially useful in groups or mass plantings.

Propagation

Nandina is usually propagated by seeds. Collect mature seeds in the fall and hold them in dry storage at 40°F to develop the rudimentary embryo. Plant the seeds in the summer; they will take about 60 days to germinate. The seedlings grow slowly, and several years are needed to produce a saleable plant.

Suckers arising from the base of old plants may be removed and planted. Vegetative propagation from cuttings is less effective but has been successful when rooting compounds are used after the wound has hardened. One rooting compound formulation reported to be successful is 2500 ppm IBA + 1500 ppm NAA.

Tissue culture techniques also have been successful for propagating nandina.

Culture

Nandina is easily transplanted from containers. The canes do not branch, and therefore pruning must be done carefully. The size and density of the clump can be controlled by annually removing the oldest canes or heading them back at varying lengths.

To maintain the plants, use a light fertilizer application of a slow-release complete formulation (containing N, P, and K) three or four times a year. Iron sulfate or iron chelates can be used to correct leaf chlorosis in alkaline soils. Mulching with at least 3 inches of organic matter helps to reduce the growth of weeds, conserves soil moisture, and provides micronutrients.

Nandina has no serious insect or disease pests and is an amazingly trouble-free plant.

Cultivars

Many compact cultivars are available in Hawaii, and the list grows annually. Some of the more popular ones are listed here.

‘Atropurpurea Nana’—stiff, upright, compact form growing to 2 ft at maturity; no fruit on flowers; leaves cup slightly.

‘Fire Power’—grows to 2 ft at maturity; from New Zealand.

‘Gulf Stream’—grows to 3 ft at maturity; good blue-green summer foliage; forms large, compact mound.

‘Harbour Dwarf’—probably the best of the compact cultivars; starts branching at ground level, forming dense mound to 2–3 ft; inflorescence smaller than that of the species.

‘Moon Bay’—leaves smaller than the common species, with slight cupping; summer color is lighter green than most cultivars; mounds to 2½ ft; growing in popularity in Hawaii.

‘Moyers Red’—slowly grows to 6 ft at maturity; broad leaves; pink flowers and very red fruit.

‘Nana’ or ‘Compacta’—probably represents several clones; grows to 2–4 feet; generally mounded; little berry production.

‘San Gabriel’ (‘Kurijusi’, ‘Orihime’)—distinctly different selections; very fine textured foliage giving a delicate, lacy appearance; slowly grows to 2 ft.

‘Alba’—probably the oldest named cultivar but not common in Hawaii; light yellow foliage and white berries; canes less pigmented than red-fruited types.

‘Umpqua Warrior’—tallest and fastest growing of the named selections; grows to 9 ft at maturity; can become floppy; large leaflets and large fruit clusters.

‘Variegata’—a Japanese cultivar with light white variegation when grown in shade; grows to 3–6 ft at maturity.

David Hensley and Jay Deputy
Department of Horticulture

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General form and growth habit of a common nandina.



‘Harbour Dwarf’ nandina is an excellent bedding plant for this curbside location.