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Selection and Care of Nandinas in North Texas

Nandinas come in a wide range of growth habits, with a variety of individual features that make them a versatile plant that can be used in most landscapes. This informational handout will demonstrate how nandinas should be used, how to properly maintain them to keep them looking beautiful, and individual cultivar information so you can select just the right nandina for your area!

Planting a Nandina

Most of the nandinas we grow in this area are very forgiving! They will grow happily in anything from full sun to around three-quarters shade. Several types will even tolerate heavier shade, even if it's not ideal for them. Simply work in a good amount of compost and expanded shale into your planting area, as you'd use in all normal shrub beds in our area, and nandina won't be fussy!

Maintaining the Best Looking Nandina

Feeding - Nandinas do fine with a balanced 2-1-1 ratio fertilizer such as our Covington's Tree & Shrub, but nandinas of all types really do appreciate additional feedings with chelated or acidified iron. This will help your nandinas stay a nice, solid green (when they should be green), without undue yellowing of the leaves. Feed nandinas strongly in the late winter/early spring for a strong push of spring growth, and again in early September.

Pruning - This is one of the most important and often mis-done maintenance steps. Nandinas are not pruned like most shrubs! They only put new growth on from the tips, and nandinas which have been "chopped" across the tops will not grow attractively from that point forward on the stems. Instead they show a splayed-out top growth that isn't the plants' best look and not filling in below as most shrubs would after a tip pruning. For most types of nandina, take the tallest one-third of the stems cleanly off at ground level each winter. This rejuvenation pruning will keep your nandina plants full and healthy looking. Prune "nana" dwarf type nandina stems cleanly off at the ground just as you would all the other varieties, but keep your pruning limited a few over-tall, lanky, or damaged stems as needed, since "nana" nandinas do not grow with the same speed and vigor of most other nandinas. New stems will emerge from the ground level to keep the plant continually full and flush, without the hollow or bare areas that improperly pruned nandina will show.

Watering and Mulching - Nandinas like moderate amounts of water. They tolerate neglect and drought, but they're better with good soil moisture. No unusual mulching is needed, simply maintain the normal 2" layer of mulch that all of your flowerbeds should have for the best looking nandina. A nice layer of mulch reduces drought stresses on your plants, giving a lush and bright green plant with fewer waterings.

Don't Worry Too Much - Nandinas are a pretty resilient plant. If you ever do have an insect or disease problem, after treatment and a winter's pruning, you'll generally have vigorous, healthy new growth the following spring and a good looking plant once more. (Since most nandinas will have every single stem replaced every three years if normal pruning recommendations are followed, the equivalent of losing a third of the top of the plant every year, don't sweat losing a cane here, a few leaves there. The plant will be OK as long as you treated the initial problem.)

Selecting your New Nandina

The following includes heights, sizes, and coloration of all of the types of nandinas we carry. Select your nandinas based upon this information. Some nandinas have flowers and berries. Birds love nandina berries!

Blush Pink: A "nana" nandina that grows 2' tall x 1-2' wide, Blush is an improved "nana" type with blush pinkish-red colored new growth tips throughout much of the growing season instead of the typical lime green new growth of most "nana" types. Blush Pink has the normal crimson winter color of 'Firepower' too, so it's got some color just about year 'round! Blush Pink does better in light shade during our summer heat. No berries.

Compacta: A more compact variety of the original *Domestica* nandina, 'Compacta' has the upright lacy look of a *Domestica* nandina on stiffly upright stems, blooms white flower spikes in the spring followed with red berries during the winter. The plant grows to 4-5' T x 3-4' W, with bright red winter leaf color.

Domestica: This is the original nandina from which all others came! Upright grower to 6-8' T x 3-4' W, the plant will flower white clusters in the spring with red berries during the winter. The winter leaf color is a bright red. *Domestica* nandina has a very lacy, airy look. Great in grouping or as a natural screen.

Firepower: A 2' T x 2' W compact grower, 'Firepower' is the standard in "nana" nandinas. Good red winter coloration, bright green new growth in the spring. 'Firepower' likes a bit of light shade in our area, and must be watered and mulched well to look right in full sun. No berries.

Flirt: 1-2' T x 1.5'-2.5' W, Flirt is an improved 'Harbor Dwarf' nandina, with deep red new growth that holds good coloration for months after it emerges. Flirt goes from red winter color to deep green leaves framing deep red new growth during the late spring and summer. White flowers in last spring.

Gulf Stream: 3' T x 3' W, has bright scarlet new growth which matures to deep green on a densely-growing plant. Leaves turn red once the winter cold sets in and hold color longer in sunny areas. 'Gulf Stream' is a nice tight plant. Occasionally flowers but no berries.

Harbor Belle: 2' T x 2' W, Harbor Belle has pinkish new growth with extra-dark green leaves, good red winter coloration, and berries! Harbor Belle will spike white flowers in the spring with bright red berries in the fall and winter. Improved berry production is the primary feature to distinguish Harbor Belle from Harbor Dwarf. If berry production is unimportant, use whichever plant looks better at time of purchase. An improved Harbor Dwarf selection. Better than normal shade tolerance for a nandina.

Harbor Dwarf: 1.5-2' T x 1.5'-2' W, Harbor Dwarf has pinkish new growth with extra-dark green leaves, good red winter coloration, and limited berry production. Better than normal shade tolerance for a nandina.

Lemon Lime: 3-4' T x 3-4' W, is the first nandina to have lime green new growth which forms a nice contrast to the darker green mature foliage. Great choice to brighten darker spaces and add dimension with its fresh, citrus hue.

Obsession: A sport of 'Gulf Stream', Obsession is a newer more distinctive nandina that grows 3-4' T x 3' W and has an upright, compact, dense habit with brilliant red new foliage. Displays richer color than other nandinas. No berries.

******Nana:** The general category that Blush, 'Firepower', and 'Firehouse' fall into, "Nana" refers to the original 'Atropurpurea Nana' nandina. The above named types are newer and improved varieties of 'Atropurpurea Nana'. Most refer to 'Firepower' and "Nana" interchangeably, as the obvious differences are minor, but 'Firepower' is free of a virus that would twist the leaves of the original and has come to be the default "Nana" type. Few people grow the original 'Atropurpurea Nana' anymore.