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# SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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## Space Invaders - Nandina

By Lee Eastland, SMG Member

### **Nandina domestica “heavenly bamboo”.**

Scientific Classification: Kingdom: Plantae; Order: Ranunculales; Family: Berberidaceae; Genus: *N. domestica*; Binomial name: *Nandina domestica*; Common names: nandina, heavenly bamboo, or sacred bamboo.

Nandina is an evergreen shrub and not a bamboo, which grows to a mature height of 4 to 8 ft. tall and 2 to 5 ft. wide with glossy leaves and numerous stems growing from the ground level. Nandina is considered an evergreen shrub, however, in the colder climates it can act as a deciduous, dropping its leaves in the winter.

The leaves can be as long as 10 to 40 inches, compound, with individual leaflets 2 to 4 inches long and 1/2” to 1” wide. New leaves are a pink to red



color before turning green and then turning red to purple before falling. The flowers are white and are borne in spring to early summer occurring in clusters above the foliage with the fruit a bright red ripening in late fall and winter.

Nandina is a native of India, China, and Japan and was imported into the United States in 1804 as an ornamental plant. It is an attractive plant in landscaping and is hardy in zones 6 -10 with some species (there are over 50 species of nandina) doing well in zone 5 with tolerance for dry conditions and temperatures from -10 to +110 degrees Fahrenheit. Initially it looks like a great plant to add to your landscape; however it is toxic and invasive in many areas. All parts of the plant are toxic (leaves, stems, and fruit) to pets, grazing animals, and birds. The

berries are very toxic and have been known to kill cedar waxwings and other birds that eat them.



*Fruit can be toxic to birds.*

Nandina is considered an invasive species in North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Texas, with several other states considering putting nandina on their invasive species list. It can spread by seeds and growth of rhizomatous (underground stems) which can make it difficult to get rid of as one needs to remove all roots, seeds, as well as the plant.

I would not advise using this plant in your landscape, but rather using alternatives (depending on your location) such as pacific ninebark, red elderberry, red huckleberry, serviceberry, snowbush, or red twig dogwood. If you're like me and have already planted this shrub in your landscape, you should remove the berries in the fall and then replace plants as the opportunity presents itself. Unfortunately, most nurseries and landscape firms are still recommending, selling, and planting this shrub in landscapes.

#### Sources:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/nandina-domestica/>  
<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/>  
<https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/>  
<https://www.oregonlive.com/beaverton/index.ssf/2014/01/nandina>  
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All photos: North Carolina University Extension

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