

**TITLE: Prune Your Nandina To Look “Heavenly”.**

**Description:** Nandina (*Nandina domestica*), is sometimes called heavenly bamboo because, like bamboo, it has lightly branched, cane-like stems and delicate, fine-textured foliage. It is a broadleaf evergreen shrub.

**Objective(s):** Determine if you have a standard or dwarf variety. Assess the location for full sun, as this will produce the best color. Decide if you will keep or remove, and if you decide to keep it, learn how to properly prune it.

**WHAT:**

- Nandina do well in USDA zones 6 through 9, so they are well suited to East Tennessee. Once established, nandinas are very drought tolerant plants.
- Nandina will lose its leaves at 10 °F. Stems are damaged at 5 °F, but the plant usually recovers fast. **Careful pruning must be practiced; NEVER shear a nandina.**
- *Nandina domestica* is considered an invasive plant in the Southeast US, and can grow 12” – 24” per year. Because of this, cultivars that produce fruit are not recommended as residential landscape plants. Berries form in late summer and last into winter.
- Dwarf nandina cultivars do not produce fruit, and rarely get more than 3’ tall.

**WHY:**

- Dwarf nandina are compact and dense, limiting the amount of sun that can get into the plant
- Older canes get “woody” and drop their leaves
- Some canes form “moon shots”, often due to shearing (see photo)

**WHEN:**

- Spring is the best time to prune dwarf (non-fruiting) nandina. They may not need to be pruned every year.
- Fruiting nandina should be pruned during dormancy, and after the fruit has lost its beauty. This would be late winter.

**HOW:**

- All: It is best to thin out old canes/stems every year
- Standard / Fruiting: Selectively cut one-third of the other branches about half their length to encourage a full, dense canopy. This will prevent them from getting “leggy” and “floppy”
- Renovation/Renewal pruning: Renew neglected nandina by removing 1/3 of the oldest canes in the spring of each year for three years. After three years, it will look like a three-year-old shrub.



## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Nandina prefers full sun, and has the best color in full sun.
- Standard varieties bear fruit which contains cyanide and is toxic to several species of birds: cedar waxwing, northern mockingbird. American robin
- Dwarf varieties do NOT bear fruit
- Use pruners and/or loppers to prune nandina; never use hedge shears
- Nandina is a “cane” shrub and should be pruned as such.
  1. Remove older, “woody” canes at the ground level
  2. Thin canes so that sun can get into the middle of the shrub
  3. Shape the canopy, if necessary. This is rarely necessary.
- Light pruning, done annually, results in the best-looking nandina shrubs

## OTHER INTERESTING FACTS

- Nandina do not have any serious diseases or insect problems
- Nandina are considered deer resistant.

## Additional Resources / References:

Clemson Cooperative Extension, Nandina Fact Sheet, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/nandina/>

University of TN [PB1619-Pruning Landscape Trees, Shrubs and Groundcovers](#)

Cass Turnbull’s Guide to Pruning, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2012

Dirr’s Encyclopedia of Trees & Shrubs, Michael A. Dirr, Timber Press

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