

GREEN GONE BAD

FEATURED ORNAMENTAL PLANT: *NANDINA DOMESTICA* (SACRED OR HEAVENLY BAMBOO)

Some exotic ornamental plants behave badly when they escape from the place they are planted. Infestations of these plants have negative impacts on nature. One of these plants is *Nandina domestica*; common name: sacred bamboo.

Nandina domestica is a small erect evergreen shrub in the barberry family (Berberidaceae). The native range of *Nandina domestica* is Eastern Asia and India and was first introduced into North America in 1804. It has been planted widely as an ornamental and often escapes from old plantings in the southeastern U.S. Infestations often occur within natural areas around historic home sites and near urban areas.



Nandina domestica grows up to 8 feet tall with numerous bushy stems. The overlapping sheaths of the leafstalks on the main stem give the appearance of cane or bamboo. Green or reddish leaves are alternately whorled, glossy and bipinnately compound. *Nandina* produces dense panicles of whitish flowers in spring or summer. Bright red berries appear in late fall and may last through



winter. It is usually found under forest canopies and at forest edges once escaped. Cultivars now exist that do not produce seed in a nursery environment.



The problem with *Nandina domestica* is that it can escape from planted landscapes into natural areas. It colonizes an area vegetatively via underground root sprouts and spreads by animal-dispersed seeds (birds and mammals). Once established, *Nandina domestica* can displace native plants effectively reducing biodiversity and wildlife habitat quality. Additionally, *Nandina* does not support the insects required by songbirds for feeding their young. Native plants like the ones listed below will greatly improve songbird habitats in landscapes when used in place of non-native plants like *Nandina*.



It may not be widely known among horticulturalists and landscapers that this plant can be harmful to natural habitats. Please consider removing this species from your inventory. There are many native shrubs that can be sold and planted in its place. These include the evergreens *Morella cerifera* (wax myrtle), *Ilex vomitoria* (yaupon holly), *Ilex glabra* (inkberry), *Ilex opaca* (American holly), *Baccharis halimifolia* (groundsel tree), *Osmanthus americanus* (wild olive or devilwood), *Kalmia latifolia* (mountain laurel), or *Leucothoe fontanesiana* (highland doghobble). Another option is *Xanthorrhiza simplicissima* (Yellowroot), a deciduous or semi-evergreen native shrub with leaves similar to *Nandina* that behaves as a low-maintenance spreading groundcover.

Please visit <http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3057> for more information.