



A 'heavenly' genus

With new cultivars in the works and year-round coloring, *Nandina* has taken root

Bailey Nurseries worked with the University of Georgia on the Cool Glow® series of *Nandina*, including this Cool Glow® Peach (*N. d.* 'Zhnan28' PP32397). In addition to its shades of peach and apricot in the fall and winter, it has compact habit and a sparse seed set. PHOTO COURTESY BAILEY NURSERIES

BY JON BELL

THEY CAN BE A FIERY RED, a pretty pink or a deep, dark burgundy. Some are golden or amber depending on the season, while others nearly glow in soft peach tones.

But when Debbie Lonnee, product development manager for **Bailey Nursery**, comes to Oregon in the summer, she sees them at Bailey's locations on Sauvie Island and in the Willamette Valley at their tamest. They are the leafy shrubs commonly called Heavenly Bamboo or Sacred Bamboo (*Nandina domestica*).

"I usually go to Oregon in the summer," Lonnee said, "when *Nandina* is boring and green."

That's not really a knock on the plant, however. In fact, one of *Nandina's* most attractive traits is that it offers year-round color, whether it's the more vibrant

hues present in the late fall and winter or the milder greens of spring and summer.

"They look good year-round," said Jim Simnitt, co-owner of **Simnitt Nursery** (Canby, Oregon), which grows five different varieties of *Nandina*. "They show color change, some of them have berries so they add interest, and they're not deciduous, so they don't go away in the fall and turn to sticks."

A good luck plant

Native to China and Japan, *Nandina* made its way to Europe and North America by way of introduction in the early 1800s. According to information from the University of Arizona's Campus Arboretum, it was named by Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg in 1781, who named it after *nanten*, the common Japanese name, which means southern

sky. The Japanese word also has the same pronunciation as the word meaning "problems that turn for the better," which has given *Nandina* an association with good luck.

Though its common name refers to it as a bamboo, *Nandina* is similar to bamboo only in appearance. In reality, it is a broadleaf evergreen shrub that can grow to between 2 and 4 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet tall. They are hardy from zone 6 to 9 in North America and are ideal for foundation and mass plantings.

Cindy Ferguson is a certified production horticulturalist for **Sidhu & Sons Nursery** outside of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She said the attractive shrub is ideal for a wide range of uses, as well as being versatile in the garden and happy in full sun to partial shade.

"*Nandina* is a staple in many plant-

'Heavenly' genus



Bright yellow to lime green fall and winter color distinguish this *Nandina*. Cool Glow® Lime has lacy dark green foliage throughout the year with a compact habit and sparse seed set. It grows well in a range of soil types, including dry conditions. PHOTO COURTESY BAILEY NURSERIES

ings, as its new flush of foliage in the spring stands out and the showy fall and winter foliage allows this evergreen to stand out during the drab winter months,” Ferguson said.

And while *Nandina* prefers slightly acid soil, it’s easy to grow, will tolerate most growing conditions and requires little pruning or maintenance.

“Heavenly Bamboo is an excellent specimen or accent plant,” Ferguson said. “It works well by adding height to container plantings. It also makes an eye-catching border or small hedge. The finely textured leaves set it apart from other trees and shrubs. It’s also sought after for city or urban plantings, as it’s tolerant of drought and urban conditions once established.”

Cultivating colors

Some cultivars of *Nandina* have been designated as invasive in certain states, as some of the plants have a tendency to spread and crowd out native species. And the berries of some *Nandina* have proven to be toxic to birds, who feast on the fruit late in the season once other food sources have been depleted. Experts recommend that home gardeners who have *Nandina* that produce berries simply prune the fruit as it appears.

These characteristics, along with a desire to come up with even bolder colors, have led to the creation of hundreds of *Nandina*. The UA Campus Arboretum notes that at one time, there were more than 200 cultivars developed in Japan alone.

Lonnee said Bailey Nursery and its

breeding arm, Bailey Innovations, have worked with breeders in North America and around the world on a range of new cultivars, including *Nandina*. The nursery worked closely with breeders at the University of Georgia to introduce three popular ones as part of its First Editions collection of licensed plants: Cool Glow® Pomegranate (*N. d.* ‘Zhnan53’ PP32422), Cool Glow® Peach (*N. d.* ‘Zhnan28’ PP32397) and Cool Glow® Lime (*N. d.* ‘Zhnan102’ PP32470).

In addition to their unique colors, the Peach and Lime cultivars are described as having “lacy dark green foliage that is incredibly attractive throughout the year with a compact habit and sparse seed set,” the latter attribute meaning they don’t



Cool Glow® Pomegranate Nandina turns red during the winter in a compact habit with lacy dark green foliage that remains eye-catching throughout the year. PHOTO COURTESY BAILEY NURSERIES

spread as much as some others might. All three also grow well in a range of soil types, including dry conditions, which has made them especially popular in the South.

“I was born and raised in Minnesota, and we don’t grow that many broadleaf evergreens there,” Lonnee said. “In the South, that’s what gardeners want in their landscape. They want foliage all year long. That’s exactly what *Nandina* gives them.”

She said commercial landscapers are also big fans of *Nandina* for medians, parking areas, hospitals and other locations.

Kraemer’s Nursery, a wholesale nursery in Mount Angel, Oregon, is licensed to grow Bailey’s First Editions *Nandina*. It also grows some others, including *N. d.* ‘Tuscan Flame’ PP21940 — a drought-tolerant shrub with bright red foliage — and *N. d.* ‘Gulf Stream’, which has foliage that transforms from red in the spring to blue-green in the summer before white flowers appear.

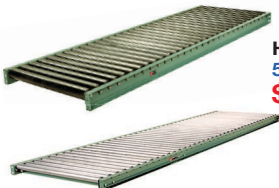
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Hot sellers

Chris Ames, operations director for Kraemer's, said the nursery propagates its *Nandina* via cuttings that are placed in flats with pumice and peat moss in September. By February, they are ready to go into liner pots, and by the following August, they're transplanted into two-gallon pots. It then takes another year for them to finish. The entire time they're under cover, first in a mist house, then in a polyhouse that has side walls that can be raised and lowered as necessary to increase airflow and maintain temperatures.

Ames said *Nandina* typically grow well, the only main concern being too much water. And the shrubs always sell well, largely in the fall but also in spring, another testament to *Nandina*'s year-round coloring.

"When they're ready, they sell," Ames said, noting that Kraemer's customers are largely big box stores and independent garden centers. "They're the kind of item that will sell year-round. A lot of them have really nice fall color and will sell then, but also they're nice in the spring too. If I looked out there now, there's hardly any left. We love that."

Although they do sell well for Kraemer's, Ames said *Nandina* are a small percentage of what the nursery sells annually. It may grow more than 5,000 *Nandina* shrubs each year, but it also grows more than half-a-million roses annually.

"It's a small amount, but we like having that variety," Ames said. "And the colors are so interesting on them."

Ferguson said Sidhu & Sons' *Nandina* offerings include *N. d.* 'Gulf Stream', *N. d.* 'Harbour Dwarf' and *N. d.* 'Fire Power', plus its own trademarked introductions of Bonfire™ (*N. d.* 'Nansid6' PP29798) and Goldstream™ (*N. d.* 'Nansid11' PP34614), all of which are offered in liner size, quart and container #1, #2 and #3 pots.

"While the regular varieties are requested for orders, our most popular by far is our introduction 'Nansid6' Bonfire™," she said. "With its unique slender twisty leaves and fiery new growth, this shrub continually sells out and is in high demand."



Sidhu & Sons' trademarked *Nandina* introductions of Bonfire™ (*N. d.* 'Nansid6' PP29798, top photo) and Goldstream™ (*N. d.* 'Nansid11' PP34614, bottom photo). COURTESY SIDHU & SONS

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Heavenly colors



One of the *Nandina*'s that Kramer's Nursery in Mount Angel, Oregon, grows includes *N. d.* 'Tuscan Flame' PP21940, a drought-tolerant shrub with bright red foliage throughout the year.

PHOTO COURTESY BAILEY NURSERIES

Sprouting up

In addition to the cultivars it already offers, Ferguson said there are a couple other introductions of *Nandina* currently being trialed at Sidhu & Sons. That means there may be even more options to choose from in the not-too-distant future.

The same goes for Bailey Nurseries. Lonnee said the company is hoping to come up with additional *Nandina* selections for its First Editions collection that would be more drought tolerant and amenable to the changing climates in California and Arizona. Bailey has worked closely with the University of California, both at Davis and Irvine, in the past on coming up with new cultivars of other plants that are more drought tolerant. It's planning to do the same with *Nandina* in the coming years after first spending more time on the breeding end of the process. The goal there is to come up with *Nandina* that have even better colors than they already do.

"We're trying to improve the colors," Lonnee said. "The reds are so popular with customers, so we're looking into some that have even better red and then some with a great burgundy color."

Once they identify the cultivars with the best colors, they'll move on to drought testing at various sites around the country.

"If we know they work in California, that's where we'll be able to market them in a distinctive way," Lonnee said. "We would like to have First Editions in all our stores in the country. We needed to find more plants for California and Arizona, and I think the *Nandina* work we're doing will fit the bill." ☺

Jon Bell is an Oregon freelance journalist who writes about everything from Mt. Hood and craft beer to real estate and the great outdoors. His website is www.JBellInk.com.

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