Growing Nandina Domestica

Commonly known as ‘Chopstick Plant’ or ‘Sacred Bamboo’

Nandina have been grown in the UK since 1804. They are well established hardy evergreen or semi evergreen plants in UK gardens growing in small clumps of woody shoots up to 6 or 8ft in height. They originate from China and Japan and are grown for their attractive pinnate leaves which can be up to 3ft long and their conical panicles of white flowers which can be up to 15in in length.

More recently, breeding primarily in New Zealand, has produced a whole range of somewhat smaller growing forms which are grown and admired for their foliage effect in autumn and winter rather than their flowers. N. domestica 'Woods Dwarf' grows to only 2ft tall and is useful as a border shrub with reddish purple foliage in the autumn. N. domestica 'Firepower' has a superb show of red leaves long into the spring. We will shortly be introducing a cultivar with attractive yellow new growth.

Nandina grow best in full sun but sheltered from cold winds. They need moist but well drained soil. The smaller growing forms make excellent groundcover while the larger growing cultivars make freestanding border shrubs. There is no reason not to grow and admire them in the greenhouse or as patio plants but they do not really need any special attention.

Flowering, in those forms which readily do, occurs in July or August, sometimes later. The flowers are followed by red or purplish red berries which often hold into the next season so that you can have flowers and berries together especially if grown in containers. The ripe seeds can be sown in containers in the greenhouse straight away in the autumn. Cuttings are most easily rooted with bottom heat in late summer.

The common names of Nandina domestica are easy to understand when admiring mature clumps with their upright woody stems in the garden. The newer dwarfish cultivars present more of a stretch!