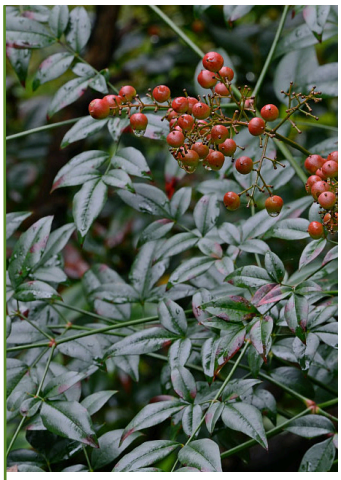
SPECIES COMMON NAMES:

Nandina, Sacred Bamboo

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Nandina domestica



Threat

Nandina (*Nandina domestica*) is an emerging invasive species. A commonly planted ornamental, this species will escape plantings and invade various habitats. It is adaptable and can succeed in both sun and shade, and different soil types. Nandina is able to spread root sprouts underneath the ground, and produces abundant berries that are eaten and spread by wildlife. However, these berries contain cyanide, making them toxic to the animals that consume them — most notably birds.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

There are many native shrubs that can make excellent alternatives for nandina without causing a negative environmental impact. Evergreen options include different types of holly such as **inkberry** (*Ilex glabra*) or **American holly** (*Ilex opaca*). Both plants also have white flowers, and American holly produces red berries. American holly can grow fairly large, but dwarf cultivars are available that may better suit a home garden. Deciduous options are plentiful. The native **winterberry** (*Ilex verticillata*) has white flowers and red berries, while **Virginia sweetspire** (*Itea virginica*), different varieties of **fetterbush** (*Eubotrys* spp.), and different varieties of **viburnums** (*Viburnum* spp.) also have white flowers.

Inkberry

Report Sightings

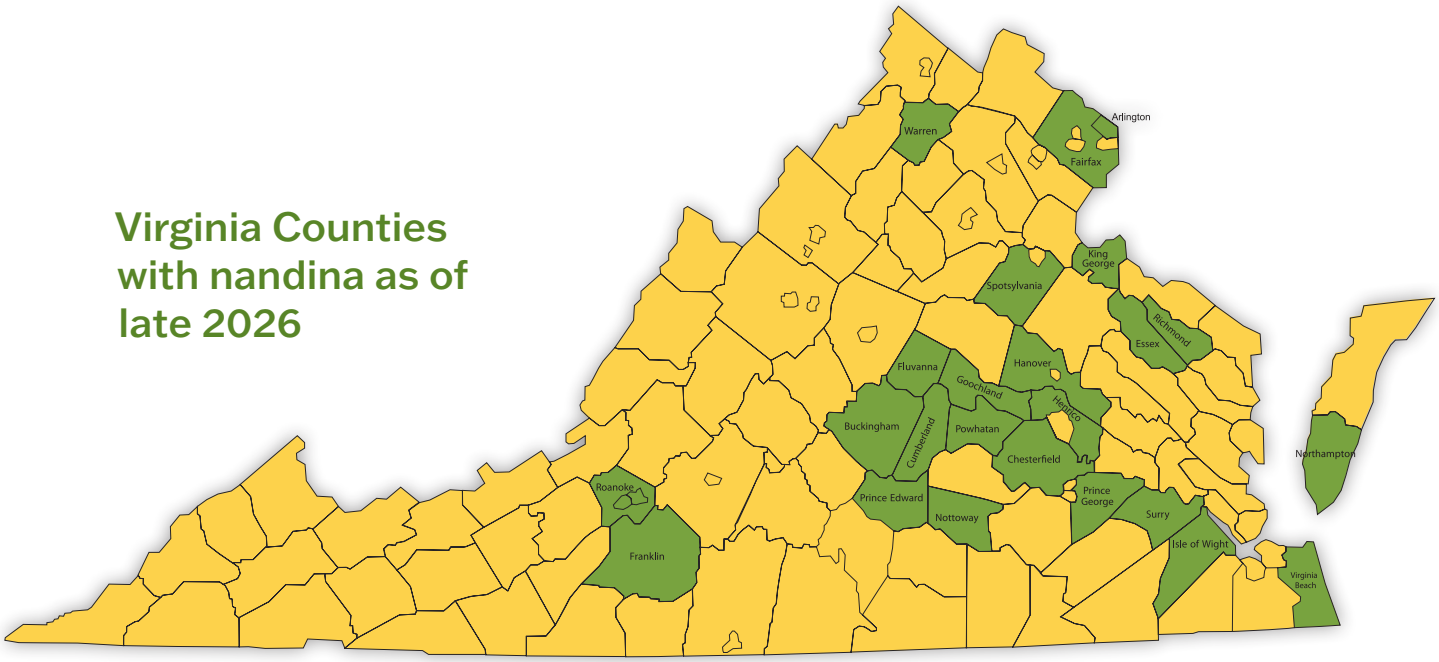
If you believe you have found a wild occurrence of nandina, you can assist in conservation efforts by reporting your finding. Collect complete location information including coordinates if possible. Take clear photos of the plant from a distance and up close. Detailed images of leaves, flowers, fruits and bark are particularly helpful. Reports can be emailed directly to **invasive.species@dcr.virginia.gov** or reported online through the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS). Reports can also be made on a smartphone using the free EDDMapS or iNaturalist apps.

Description

Nandina is a multi-stemmed woody shrub that can reach heights of 8 feet, though is typically found at heights closer to 5 or 6 feet. It is alternate branched with pinnately compound leaves, meaning that each leaf is composed of many small leaflets arranged around one central stem. Leaves are glossy, evergreen and can be green or sometimes red in color. Individual leaflets are lance- or diamond-shaped. In the summer, white flower clusters will appear. These will become bright red berries that persist throughout the winter. While nandina is not related to bamboo, it can resemble it, leading to other common names such as “heavenly bamboo” or “sacred bamboo.”

INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES OF VIRGINIA

Virginia Counties with nandina as of late 2026



Distribution

Nandina is widespread throughout much of the southeastern United States and is a common escape in Virginia. It has been most frequently documented in the coastal plain, but escapes are likely under-documented statewide.

Nandina is found most often in disturbed forests, but is also able to invade more natural habitats. It can tolerate a wide variety of soil and sunlight types. It is most commonly found invading areas near where it has been planted.

Control

Manual removal of nandina can be difficult, as resprouts will occur from any piece of the roots not removed. If attempting to remove by hand, do so when the ground is soft. Small plants can be pulled by hand; larger plants can sometimes be removed with weed wrench devices. Ensure all roots are removed.

Herbicides will often be required in order to achieve mortality. For additional information on chemical control options, contact your local cooperative extension agent or area forester.

Where nandina is planted as an ornamental and cannot be removed, removing and responsibly disposing of the red fruit can help prevent spread. Fruit should never be composted; instead, double-bag fruits and dispose of them as trash.

Photo credits:
Gary P. Fleming *Nandina domestica Nandina domestica2*
Leslie J Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

TO REPORT A SIGHTING:

DCR Invasive Species Team
invasive.species@dcr.virginia.gov

Online mapping and reporting tool:
http://eddmaps.org

Smartphone apps: **iNaturalist, EDDMapS**

SOURCES

EDDMapS. 2025. Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System. The University of Georgia - Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health. Available online at http://www.eddmaps.org/; Accessed August 4, 2025.

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Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation

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