

**2009 CANR Research Final Report:
Non-invasive Cultivars for the Green Industry**

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Introduction

Promotion, production and use of plants considered invasive have placed the Green Industry under scrutiny, no matter whether the plants in question are truly invasive or are invasive in all regions. The annual cost of invasive plants to the U.S. has been estimated at more than \$34 billion (Pimentel et al., 2005). An estimated 85% of woody plants now considered invasive were originally introduced for landscape purposes (Bell et al., 2003). The establishment of the National Invasive Species Council (1999) and its release of the National Invasive Species Management Plan (NISC, 2001) have major implications on the ability of the Green Industry to produce some current plants and introduce new plants. However, cultivars of species may have characteristics making them less invasive (Wood, 2007).

One strategy for the nursery industry is to identify and promote non-invasive cultivars of plants otherwise considered invasive. Availability of non-invasive cultivars will provide the Green Industry with a ready substitute to the invasive cultivars for continued use of these popular plants. Promotion and use of noninvasive cultivars will improve the industry's image and standing with environmental groups as well as federal, state or local governments.

Background

University of Florida researchers Sandy Wilson, Zhanao Deng, Rosanna Freyre and I have been researching invasiveness of cultivars of ornamental species (see "Literature Cited"). For example, nandina (*Nandina domestica*) is an extremely popular landscape plant in USDA Hardiness Zones 6-10. Introduced to the U.S. before 1804, the species has since escaped cultivation in nine states (USDA NRCS, 2008). Our previous research results showed wide variation in growth and fruiting among nandina cultivars and regions of Florida. This research validates the importance of research to assess cultivars of ornamentals for invasiveness and also indicates ornamentals should be trialed in various regions to assess invasiveness in each region.

This previous research has identified a number of non-invasive cultivars of otherwise invasive species including *Nandina domestica* 'Firepower' (Firepower Heavenly Bamboo), *N. domestica* 'Harbour Dwarf' (Harbour Dwarf Heavenly Bamboo), *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' (Red Fountain Grass), *Ruellia tweediana* 'Purple Showers' (Purple Showers Mexican Petunia) and several selections of *Stachytarpheta* species (porterweed; 'Mario Pollsa', 'Naples Lilac', 'Violacea' and *S. mutabilis* (coral porterweed)).

As with nandina, Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) and glossy privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) have widely naturalized throughout the southeastern United States, dominating the understory of mesic forests and displacing native plant communities. A third privet, japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*) has escaped cultivation but is not listed as invasive. All three species have ornamental value, with numerous cultivars commercially available. Current designation of the invasive status of these species was based on the wild-type selection of each, since landscape use of cultivars in the southeastern United States was not common until the 1900s. However, subsequently production shifted to selected cultivars that have been widely

utilized in the landscape. No information exists on invasiveness of *Ligustrum* cultivars. Over 40 cultivars of nandina exist but information on invasiveness is only available for 11 selections (Knox and Wilson 2006).

Current CANR Funded Research

The overall objective of this research is to characterize the potential invasive impact (growth rate, flowering period, seed production, germination requirements) of *Ligustrum* and *Nandina* species and cultivars as compared to the unimproved form ("wild type") of each. Twelve selections of *Ligustrum* spp. and eight selections of *Nandina domestica* (Table 1) are being evaluated over a 3-year period for potential invasive impact (growth rate, flowering period, seed production, germination requirements). Six of the nandina selections have not been studied previously.

Field plantings of nine uniform plants of each were installed in 2008 under full sun conditions in south Florida (Fort Pierce, USDA Cold Hardiness 9b) and north Florida (Quincy, USDA Cold Hardiness, 8b). Plants were spaced 1.2 m (4 ft) on center in beds covered with polyethylene landscape fabric. Plants are irrigated as needed and fertilized annually with 18 g (0.6 oz) of 12-month 15N-9P-12K Osmocote Plus. Plants were evaluated monthly for flowering and fruiting, and tri-monthly for visual quality based on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1=poor, and 5=excellent. Observations of flower initiation and fruit set are recorded monthly. At annual fruit maturity, fruit is harvested and quantified.

2009 Results

Visual quality and flowering in 2009 varied by cultivar and site. Regardless of cultivar, after 72 weeks (Nov. 2009), north Florida plants received higher visual quality ratings than south Florida plants. 'Howard' japanese privet, 'Jack Frost' japanese privet, and 'Variegatum' chinese privet had very good to excellent landscape performance at both sites. After 72 weeks, north Florida plants were 1.2 to 2.8 times larger and produced 31 times more fruit than south Florida plants (Wilson and Knox 2010).

This multi-year project is scheduled to conclude in December 2010.

Literature Cited and Other References

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Table 1. List and descriptions of *Ligustrum* and *Nandina* species and cultivars obtained for this study.

Scientific Name	Description
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i>	Dense evergreen shrub or small tree with upright habit. Heavily branched habit responds well to pruning into hedges, topiary or small trees. Fast grower to 6 to 12 feet tall, 6 to 8 feet wide. White flowers in spring, black berries maturing in fall.
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> 'Howard'	Also known as 'Frazieri'. New leaves are yellow turning to glossy, dark green with age, although older leaves may retain a splash of yellow. Moderate growth rate.
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> 'Jack Frost'	Shiny, leathery green leaves have creamy white margins. Grows 6 to 12 feet tall and 6 to 8 feet wide. Small white flowers in spring.
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> 'Lake Tresca'	Slow-growing, compact shrub up to 8 feet tall with small, rounded leaves on a plant with a mounding habit. Creamy-white flowers. An FNGA (now FNGLA) Plant of the Year in 1999.
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> 'Rotundifolium' (received as, and also known as, 'Coriaceum')	Also known as 'Coriaceum'. Attractive crinkled, thick, dark green leaves appear crowded on stems. Plant habit is stiff and upright, growing 4 to 6 feet tall. Considered less hardy than the species. White flowers in summer. Introduced from Japan by Fortune in 1860.
<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> 'Texanum'	Sometimes listed as <i>L. texanum</i> . Large glossy dark green leaves on a compact, upright plant. Grows up to 10 feet tall. Spring flowers.
<i>Ligustrum lucidum</i>	Fast-growing evergreen tree, 25 to 40 feet tall (occasionally up to 50 feet) and 25 to 35 feet wide. Glossy green leaves are large, 4 to 6 inches long, with narrow, translucent margins. Terminal, 6 to 10-inch panicles of small, white flowers are produced in late spring and are followed by blue-black fruit.

Scientific Name	Description
<i>Ligustrum lucidum</i> (or <i>L. japonicum</i>) 'Davidson Hardy'	This selection is more cold hardy than the species. It has been hardy at Davidson College, Davidson, NC, where foliage wasn't damaged by -15F. Leaves are a flat dark green and the plant is larger and coarser than cultivars like 'Nobilis' and 'Recurvifolium'. This cultivar was received as <i>Ligustrum lucidum</i> but it has been variably assigned to <i>L. lucidum</i> and <i>L. japonicum</i> .
<i>Ligustrum sinense</i>	Evergreen to semi-evergreen shrub growing 10 to 15 feet tall and wide (rarely 20 feet tall). Adapted from full sun to dense shade and from dry to wet soils. Panicles of creamy-white flowers are 2 to 3 inches long and occur in late spring. Flowers are followed by waxy black fruit that may persist through winter.
<i>Ligustrum sinense</i> 'Swift Creek'	An improved selection of <i>L. sinense</i> 'Variegatum' with leaves that show more variegation and less green area. The plant grows slower and is said to be much less likely to revert to solid green foliage. It is a new form from Lanny Thomas at Swift Creek Nursery in North Carolina. Mature plant size is 8 to 10 feet tall and wide.
<i>Ligustrum sinense</i> 'Variegatum'	Leaves have cream- to white margins. This selection is not as fast-growing as the species and attains heights of 6 to 8 feet (occasionally 15 feet). Branches are known to revert to all-green leaves. Flowers in late spring or early summer.
<i>Ligustrum</i> × 'Suwannee River'	Said to be a hybrid of <i>Ligustrum japonicum</i> and <i>L. lucidum</i> . Dark green evergreen leaves on a plant with a compact, mounding form. Slow-growing to 4 feet tall, 3 to 4 feet wide. White flowers in spring.
<i>Nandina domestica</i> (species form)	Broadleaf evergreen shrub growing 6 – 8 ft. tall; bluish-green leaves turning blush to reddish purple in winter, depending on the selection
<i>Nandina domestica</i> var. <i>leucocarpa</i> or 'Leucocarpa' or 'Alba'	Whitish fruit and lighter green foliage, otherwise similar to the species; grows 5 – 6 ft. tall
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'AKA' Blush™	A sport of 'Firepower' with each growth flush sporting red coloration. Blush red colored foliage is long-lasting in contrast to the typical lime-green colored new growth of 'Firepower'. Selected at the Magnolia Gardens Nursery tissue culture facility and introduced in 2008
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Firehouse'	Chosen for its excellent red fall color; this dwarf variety holds that red fire engine color all winter long. This compact mounding form has bright green spring foliage. Selected by Greenleaf Nursery.
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Firepower'	Dwarf similar to 'Atropurpurea Nana' but without contorted leaves; Foliage turns brilliant red in fall and winter.
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Firestorm'™	This cultivar's color and soft texture distinguish it from traditional dwarf nandinas. In winter, leaves turn deep red and in summer, new growth is red and contrasts with mature, green foliage. 'Firestorm'™ reaches 3 1/2 feet tall and 3 feet wide. Allegedly derived from 'Gulf Stream'™. Introduced by Plant Development Services Inc.
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Gulf Stream'™	Extremely dense growth. Does not "sucker" like 'Harbour Dwarf'. Dwarf growing 3 – 3 1/2 ft. high; variable red-green winter coloration

Scientific Name	Description
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Monfar' Sienna Sunrise™	Intense fiery red new foliage cools to lush medium green in summer; red highlights reappear in fall and winter; Slow growth 3 feet tall, 2 to 3 feet wide.