

Bamboos for Northern Gardens

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Types of Bamboo

- About one thousand species are found around the world, along with an additional one thousand varieties, forms, and cultivars.
- Bamboos are native to every continent except Europe and Antarctica.
- Generally, tropical bamboo tends to be clumpers and the temperate Bamboos tend to be runners.
- Bamboo can be used as ground cover, screens, erosion control, hedges and specimen plants.
- The constant motion with the sound of rustling leaves is a bonus.

Understanding Bamboo

- Whether they run or clump, bamboo should be thought of as a colony, not as an individual plant.
- The canes are called culms and are supported by rhizomes (remember that bamboo is a member of the grass family).
- The rhizomes have nodes and internodes, with new rhizomes and canes arising from the internodes.
- They are evergreen with few exceptions and put on new leaves each spring, dropping old leaves to the ground.
- New canes emerge from rhizome nodes at their mature diameter, growing rapidly for 40-60 days to full height and then unfolding their branches and leaves.
- Canes can live for 5 to 10 years, though some can live longer.

How to Grow and Maintain Bamboo

- Bamboos are not very temperamental. They like humidity and will grow in moist soil, but will not take waterlogged conditions.
- They prefer a rich organic soil amended with leaf mould or rotted manure.
- They will adapt to sun or shade, but shaded plants will not be as tall as plants in a sunny location. The exception is *Fargesia*, which prefers partial shade, especially from hot afternoon sun.
- Our native bamboo, *Arundinaria gigantea* is the best choice for a shady situation.
- Site them out of drying winter winds.

- Fertilize them reasonably heavy with any high nitrogen fertilizer such as any good lawn food and keep them moist with frequent deep irrigation during the growing season. Reduce water in late August to reduce late growth that could be vulnerable to winter kill.
- Use a heavy mulch that will not mat such as compost or rotted leaves to keep the ground moist and insulate against temperature extremes
- It generally takes 3 years for a planting to settle in and take on the appearance of a grove.

Controlling Running Bamboo

- The most effective barriers are a band of high density polyethylene 30 to 60 mil. buried to a depth of 24" to 36". Remember to overlap and seal seams.
- Create a 'sand trap' on the inside of the barrier, a spade wide and deep for easy maintenance and removal of unwanted rhizomes. Doing this every year will reduce the possibility that the bamboo will puncture the barrier.
- Bury all but an inch or two of the collar to leave a narrow rim above ground.
- After placing the barrier do not add anything other than tightly compacted soil to the bottom of the hole. Soil amendments should only be added near the surface to keep from encouraging deep rooting.
- It is essential to monitor all running bamboo; even those contained within a strong barrier. Wherever mulch or tall weeds create a moist, dark area near the top of the barrier, runners will sneak over and out.
- If you regularly prune out older canes in the center of the grove, large new canes will fill in making the bamboo less inclined to escape.
- Larger types of bamboo are difficult to confine to a grove smaller than 100 square feet.
- If you have at least 30 feet of lawn on all sides of your clump and mow regularly, you can probably hold it in check without a barrier

Rules of Bamboo

- Don't crowd bamboo too close to a house or valuable plants, rock garden, etc.
- Thin bamboo regularly.
- When using running bamboo and shoots come up where you don't want them, cut them down deep in the ground. This will minimize regrowth and the sharp stubs that would result from using a lawn mower.
- Remember running bamboo will infiltrate throughout, under and around, coming up where it wants.

Bamboos for Northern Landscapes

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Running Forms

Arundinaria gigantea	Canebrake Cane
Hibanobambusa tranquilans 'Shiroshima'	Shiroshima Bamboo
Indocalamus tessellatus	Broadleaf Bamboo
Pleioblastus pygmaea v. distichus	Dwarf Fernleaf Bamboo
pygmaea 'Hogumosasa'	Pygmy Bamboo
pygmaea v. okinosasa	Palm-leaved Bamboo
fortunei variegata	Dwarf White-striped Bamboo
viridi-striata	Dwarf Yellow-Stripe Bamboo
viridi-striata 'Chrysophyllus'	Dwarf Golden Bamboo
Sasa veitchi	Silver Edge Bamboo
senanensis	Senan Bamboo
Sasaella masumuneana 'Albostriata'	Dwarf White-Striped Bamboo
Shibataea kumasaca	Ruscus Leafed Bamboo
Pseudosasa japonica	Arrow Bamboo
Phyllostachys aureosulcata	Yellow Groove Bamboo
a. 'Harbin'	Harbin Bamboo
a. 'Spectabilis'	Green Groove Bamboo
bissettii	David Bissett Bamboo
nigra	Black Bamboo
nigra 'Henon'	Henon Bamboo
nuda	Snow Bamboo
vivax	Giant Timber Bamboo
Semiarundinaria fastuosa	Temple Bamboo

Clumping Bamboos

Fargesia nitida 'Juizhaigou'	Red Fountain Bamboo
rufa	Rufa Clumping Bamboo

Recommended Reading

Bamboo for Gardens – Ted Jordan Meredith, Timber Press

Ornamental Bamboos – David Crompton, Timber Press

Temperate Bamboos, The Gardeners Guide to Growing – Michael Bell, Timber Press

Bamboo –Christine Recht & Max F. Wetterwald, Timber Press

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For more information

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