

Bamboo

Thursday, 12 July 2007

Bamboo

++ Indicates that this is a variety or a species that is found in our arboretum, but not often stocked in our nursery. Inquire about availability. If we do not have it in stock, we can put you on our "waitlist" and call you when we have it available.

Bamboo is one of the most useful and versatile plants in the world. A member of the grass family, it is best known for its use as a construction material and is grown for shade, animal fodder and food. It is also highly valued as a landscaping plant. Its more than 1000 species (more than 100 are in popular cultivation) are so diverse that it is safe to say there is a bamboo to suit any need.

When selecting a bamboo for home or garden, it is important to select the growth habit best suited to the area. Generally, the temperate bamboos tend to be runners while the tropical bamboos tend to be clumping (ECHO stocks clumping varieties only). *Running* bamboo spreads underground, often by sending shoots several feet from the original culm (and potentially into one's neighbor's yard). *Clumping* bamboo sends up new shoots only a few inches from the culm, creating a tight clump. Though the clump size will increase yearly, it does not spread as extensively as running types.

Planting and Care of Bamboo

Please read our general instructions on planting nursery trees on page 53 - most of the same considerations apply. Bamboo prefers full sun. Provide new plantings ample water, fertilizer, and protection from competitive weeds. Apply at least four inches of mulch to newly planted bamboo. Water thoroughly after planting. When newly planted, especially during hot weather, water thoroughly at least twice a week. Once established, water as needed. Take care not to overwater though - excess watering (i.e. every day) can cause excess leaf drop. Well-established bamboos are rather tolerant of flooding, but newly planted bamboos can suffer from too much as well as too little water.

Most bamboos are happiest in a moderately acidic loamy soil. SW Florida soil is generally sandy, low in organic matter, and in areas with fill dirt, soils can be alkaline. Mixing organic matter, such as compost and/or manure, to the top few inches of the sand can counter the "droughtiness" and pH problems associated with many Florida soils. As mentioned above the soil should be covered with a thick mulch. Mulching the surface will keep the soil cooler, increase soil moisture, decrease weed pressure, and increase soil fertility. Over time bamboo creates its own mulch with its fallen leaves. Bamboo being a forest plant does best if its leaf mulch is kept over the roots and rhizomes, thus it is best not to rake up the bamboo leaves from under the plant. The leaves keep the soil soft and moist, and allow for the recycling of silica and other natural chemicals necessary to the bamboo.

What types of mulches should I apply around the bamboo? Almost any organic material is better than leaving the soil bare, but here are a few suggestions. Dried grass clippings raked up from a lawn work well for mulch. They are a source of nitrogen and silica. Hay is a good mulch too, but hay and manure from horse stalls can be a source of weed seed. Homemade compost or leaf rakings can certainly be used. If applying compost or manure, one should still apply a bulky mulch layer of grass, leaves, or wood chips to protect the finer organic matter from the sun-the direct heat will increase the breakdown rate and minimize its effectiveness. The type of mulch we use at ECHO is wood chips from tree pruning services. You can buy bagged wood chips at most major garden centers.

Bamboos can be planted at any time of the year in southwestern Florida and other areas with mild climates. If planting without irrigation, though not recommended, then a rainy season planting in July or August would be best. Over the years, success with bamboo will be greatly enhanced by consistent watering, an annual application of thick mulch, and fertilizing several times throughout the year.

Varieties available and/or on display at ECHO

ECHO currently carries many clumping varieties. If you do not see the variety that you want, check with our staff and ask to be added to our 'waitlist'. When we make periodic trips to other nurseries and wholesalers, we can inquire on your behalf. Please note that availability on the listed species varies enormously. Those marked by an asterisk (*) are generally available. ECHO has a large in-ground collection of bamboo that can be seen when you visit the farm.

The clump height and culm width refer to mature clumps of bamboo. The cold tolerances indicated also pertain to mature bamboos. Protect young plants especially from the cold.

Bambusa chungii (Blue Bamboo) Loose clumping. Height 30 feet. Culms 3". Cold hardy to 22 degrees. Striking blue-green culms covered with white powder. Used in paper-making and weaving.

**Bambusa chungii* var. *barbelatta*. Clumping. Height 22 feet. Culms 1 1/2". Cold hardy to 22 degrees. Grows to 3/4 of the size of *B. chungii*. Striking blue-green culms covered with white powder.

Bambusa emeiensis cv. *Flavidorens* Clumping. Height 25-30 feet. Culms 2-3". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Cultivated in China as an ornamental. A formal garden bamboo, with a nicely vertical habit. Yellow with dark green stripes.

Bambusa emeiensis cv. *Viridiflavus* Clumping. Height 25-30 feet. Culms 2-3". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Same as *Flavidorens* but striation is reversed. Green with yellow stripe.

**Bambusa lako* (East Timor Black Bamboo) Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 4". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Has striking purple-black culms with green stripes. Very popular cultivar.

Bambusa intermedia Clumping. Height 30-40 feet. Culms to 3". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Import from Yunnan Province, China, dark green, loose clumper.

Bambusa membranaceous Clumping. Height 70 feet. Culms 7". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Very impressive bamboo with delicate leaves and jade green color. Young culms have a white powdery coating. Loose clumping.

**Bambusa multiplex* 'Alphonse Karr'. Clumping. Height 15-20 feet. Culms 1/2-1" diameter. Hardy to 20 degrees or less. Has a smaller growth habit than other clumping type bamboos. Culms are bright yellow and green candy-striped culms. This is an excellent hedge material and windbreak.

**Bambusa multiplex* 'Fern Leaf'. Clumping. Height 10-12 feet. Culms 1/2". Hardy to 20 degrees. Has a smaller growth habit than other clumping type bamboos. Culms are typically golden with an arching habit. It is known as Fern Leaf Bamboo for its leaves that resemble fern fronds. This is an excellent hedge material and wind break. Plant in full sun or partial shade.

**Bambusa olhamii* (Giant Timber Bamboo). Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 3-4". Hardy to 20 degrees. It is an open clumping variety with erect culms and dark green leaves. It is extremely cold hardy and makes an excellent wind-break, shade or privacy hedge. This variety is well known for its edible shoots. Mature culms may be harvested for quality poles.

**Bambusa textilis* (Weaver's Bamboo). Clumping. Height 40 feet. Culms 2 1/2". Hardy to 20 degrees. It is a hardy and handsome variety, with extremely tight clumping and straight growth. Dark green culms turn gold in the sun. Highly recommended.

**Bambusa textilis* 'Kanapaha'. Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 2 1/2". Hardy to 20 degrees. Lower half of culms are prominently blue and branchless. This is a particularly regal selection from the Kanapaha Botanical gardens in Gainesville, Florida. Highly recommended.

Bambusa textilis albostrata. Clumping. Height 40 feet. Culms 2". Hardy to 20 degrees. Tight clumps. An extremely handsome plant with straight growth. This variety has white stripes. The thin walled culms are used for weaving.

**Bambusa textilis gracilis*. Clumping. Height 25 feet. Culms 1 1/2". Hardy to 20 degrees. This is a smaller version of *B. textilis* with beautiful straight growth and tight clumping. Highly recommended.

Bambusa tuldooides. Clumping. Height 55 feet. Culms 2.3". Hardy to 21 degrees. Produces a large number of thick walled culms growing in a tight clump. Produces lots of branches low to the ground.

Bambusa tuldooides 'Ventricosa'. (Bhudda's Belly). Clumping. Height 55 feet. Culms 2.3 ". Hardy to 21 degrees. This variety becomes a dwarf with swollen internodes when grown in pots under dry conditions. In the ground it reverts to a giant with zigzag culms and branches. Not recommended for in ground culture.

Bambusa vulgaris (Common Bamboo). Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 4". Hardy to 30 degrees. Common throughout the tropical world. Open clump, culms spaced a foot or two apart.

**Bambusa vulgaris* 'Vittata' (Hawaiian Gold). Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 4". Hardy to 30 degrees. Golden yellow culms with green vertical stripes that look painted on. Very popular ornamental. Loose clumping.

**Bambusa vulgaris* 'Wamin'. Clumping. Height 16 feet. Culms 3". Hardy to 30 degrees. A dwarf form with short and swollen lower green internodes. Loose clumping.

Dendrocalamus asper. Clumping. Height 80 feet. Culms 8". Hardy to 25 degrees, recovers quickly after a freeze. Cultivated in Java for edible shoots and construction timber, this is one of the largest bamboos grown in the United States. Culms are strong, durable and generally straight. The immense shooting culms are covered in silver-brown velvety fuzz.

Dendrocalamus asper cv. *Hitam*. Clumping. Height 80 feet. Culms 8". Hardy to 25 degrees. World's largest known black bamboo. Rare and expensive.

Dendrocalamus brandisii. Clumping. Height 80 feet. Culms 8". Hardy to 28 degrees. Native to India, it is grown widely in Southeast Asia for its sweet edible shoots and its extremely hard wood. Because of its thick walls, it is used for house construction, farm equipment, furniture, etc. Established clumps will come back quickly even after a hard freeze.

Dendrocalamus hamiltonii. Clumping. Height up to 65 feet. Culms 5-6". Cold hardy to 27 degrees. From the North East Himalayas. Red color around each node. Leaves up to 15 inches long.

Dendrocalamus latiflorus 'Mei-Nung'. Clumping. Height 65 feet. Culms 6". Hardy to 25 degrees. From Southern China/Taiwan. Beautiful light green culms striped with dark green.

**Dendrocalamus minor* 'Amoenus'. Clumping. Height 25-30 feet. Culms 2.5". Cold hardy to 25 degrees. Pale yellow culms with light green stripes. Handsome garden specimen. Culm tops bend and droop.

Dendrocalamus strictus. Clumping. Height 60 feet. Culms 5". Hardy to 30 degrees. This is the most common bamboo in India. Used mainly for pulp. Culms not very straight, often small and sometimes solid. Flowers frequently.

Gigantochloa apus. Clumping. Height up to 65 feet. Culms 4". Hardy to 27 degrees. Common in Java, not found anywhere in the wild. Used for many purposes. It has large leaves and young culms are hairy.

Gigantochloa atrovioleacea (Tropical Black Bamboo). Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 4". Hardy to 27 degrees. As the culms mature, they turn black and display irregular green vertical stripes. Commonly used for furniture and for edible shoots. Will recover rapidly from a freeze.

Guadua angustifolia 'Bicolor'. Clumping. Height up to 100 feet. Culms up to 8". Hardy to 30 degrees. Culms have vertical yellow and green stripes. Very large variety with very open clumps and a lot of thorns.

Guadua angustifolia 'Less Thorny'. Clumping. Height up to 100 feet. Culms up to 8". Hardy to 30 degrees. The largest of the American bamboos, native to Venezuela and Peru, used for house construction and furniture. This is a clone with significantly fewer and smaller thorns.

Guadua velutina. Clumping. Height 50 feet. Culms 4". Hardy to 28 degrees. Culms thick walled but not solid. Erect. New shoots have beautiful maroon culm sheaths, which cling tightly to the lower internodes.

Otatea acuminata ssp. *aztecorum* (Mexican Weeping Bamboo). Clumping. Height 20 feet. Culms 1.5". Hardy to 22 degrees. The long narrow leaves are produced in such abundance that they almost completely obscure the culms. Does not like wet conditions.

Phyllostachys vivax. Running (not currently stocked-- only in collection). Height up to 70 feet. Culms 5". Hardy to -5 degrees. Straight gray-green culms with a white powdery band under each node at sheath-fall. Fairly thick walled culms.

For more information about Bamboo:

The website for the American Bamboo Society has lots of good information about bamboo:

www.americanbamboo.org

The Florida-Caribbean branch of the ABS also has their own website:

<http://www.tropicalbamboo.org/>

ECHO's bookstore has some publications of interest: [Building with Bamboo](#) by Jules J. A. Janssen (1995) shows how bamboo has been used in different designs in developing countries and describes the varying properties and uses of different types of bamboo. \$17.50. We also carry [Bamboos](#) by Christine Recht and Max. F. Wetterwald (1992), a colorful and informative book., with more of a guide for the home gardener on bamboo. Another recommended book is [The Book of Bamboo](#) by David Farrell (recreatable). we do not

Our bamboo-related recommended book is ~~THE BOOK OF BAMBOO~~ by David Henry (regrettably, we do not carry this title in our bookstore, but it is available through Amazon.com, and other online bookstores). Published by the Sierra Club (1984, revised 1995) it is the complete compendium of information about bamboo. Very good resource about bamboo. We use it often as a reference book in our library.

The American Bamboo Society also runs a small volunteer-run bookstore for bamboo lovers. See their website for more information

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