

CHOOSING AND USING BAMBOOS

Bamboos, the evergreens of the grass family, can be a beautiful component of your landscape design. Bamboos provide shade, wind break, accoustical barriers and aesthetic beauty. They are distinctive by the size and pointed shape of their leaves with fine, parallel veins, but especially by their stems known as the canes or "culms." Bamboo culms can be golden yellow, green, honey-colored, striped, black, or even blue.

Bamboos vary in size, shape, color and growing habits and some varieties can be invasive. The invasive kind of bamboo is called a "runner." To be cautious ask your nursery. I suggest using running bamboos only in pots or containers. In our subtropical zone we can easily avoid invasive bamboo by using the other kind of bamboo known as "clumpers." Clumping bamboo grows as a tight clump, expanding slowly and evenly around its circumference with little fear of invasion in a small garden.

Bambusa vulgaris is the most common bamboo found throughout the tropical world. You can easily recognize one of its species, the Golden Hawaiian (*Bambusa vulgaris* "Vittata"), by its handsome yellow culms, irregularly striped with green. The Mexican Weeping Bamboo (*Otatea acuminata*), is another commonly used bamboo. It looks like a plume waving in the breeze and thrives in dry, well-drained areas.

If you need a screen or fence to hide a neighbor's eyesore, or even your utility lines, look at the *Bambusa textilis gracilis* with its green culms and small-sized leaves, growing 20 - 25 feet. The *Neosinocalamus affinis viridiflavus* is green with alternating yellow striped culm, medium sized leaf and grows up to 35 feet. Imagine natural high fences without the need for permits!

A solitary bamboo always makes a dramatic statement. My favorites are the Sunburst (*Bambusa pervariabilis viridistriata*), the Black Bamboo (*Gigantochloa atrovioleacea*), and the exotic Tropical Blue (*Bambusa (lignania) chungii*). The Sunburst is highly variegated. The Black Bamboo can be used to balance a garden and create depth. The Tropical Blue provides a contemporary accent in landscape design.

Try using Bamboo as a privacy hedge. *Bambusa vulgaris* 'Wamin' (often debated as another Buddha belly-type bamboo) looks like the real Buddha's Belly bamboo (*Bambusa ventricosa*) because of its swollen internodes. It grows densely and allows for privacy and sound reduction when grown as a hedge.

