

Bamboo is easy to take care of. Most of the care necessary is in planting it and for the first year after planting, with fairly minimal maintenance necessary after that.

PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Dig a hole about twice the size of the container the plant comes in.
2. Loosen the rootball to give the root system a chance to grow outwards.
3. Mix organic matter (bamboo loves all types of manure) with the excavated soil.
4. Place the plant in the hole so that the soil level matches the top of the rootball. Fill in the hole with the mixed soil and press in tightly.
5. Build a donut shaped ring around the plant and water deeply. It is very important that the bamboo not dry out during the first year after it has been planted. Signs of drying are if the bamboo leaves roll up like a cigarette paper and appear very narrow looking. This is a good reason to plant new bamboo in the fall – the winter rains will usually prevent it from drying out.
6. After the initial soaking be sure and give it some intermittent soaks (if the rain is uncooperative). Bamboo thrives best with intermittent feedings of manure. You can also apply a high nitrogen fertilizer in the spring when the new shoots develop and a low nitrogen fertilizer in the fall for increased rhizome (root system) activity.

CONTROLLING BAMBOO

The bamboo stems (culms) are one of the main attributes of the plant and should be exposed for effect. This is easily accomplished by thinning them out—mainly getting rid of the thin and unsightly ones. The culms are also more visible when the lower branches are cut out at the base. This is mainly done with the large diameter bamboo (timber types). In the smaller and dwarf varieties, the main attraction is seen in the swaying culms and various attractive variegated (striped) leaves. Many special effects can be created. Don't forget to enjoy the sound of wind rustling your bamboo grove, too! The enjoyment in bamboo can be never-ending, from stunning visual effects to many practical uses--privacy screens, shelter for tender plants, wind breaks, ground and slope stabilization, to name a few.

Running Bamboo

Running Bamboos are spreaders and need room to grow but can be curbed to the desired growing area. This is most easily done in the plant's initial stages of growth by simply cutting off the new shoots when they appear where no growth is desired. In October of each year, prune along the perimeter of the bed. Do this by stomping a sharpened, flat bladed spade or shovel to about 8-10 inches deep. If you wish to keep your bamboo in a more confined space, edge prune mid to late summer and again in October. Remove rhizomes outside the cut line.

A root barrier can be established by trenching a perimeter around where the plant is to be contained and then placing a vertical barrier made from high density polyethylene plastic material (bamboo barrier). Place the barrier in the trench so it slants outward at the top to direct rhizomes upward. Leave 2 to 3 inches above the soil to contain rhizomes that travel in the mulch. Overlap the barrier about one foot at the junction and tape it together. Another method is to fill the trench with concrete.

Some growers plant the bamboo in a raised bed with two vertical sides. The relatively shallow growing rhizomes (seldom below 1 1/2 feet) spread horizontally and will therefore not be able to extend further. A simple way of curbing the spread of bamboo is also to drip irrigate the plant at the middle only as the rhizomes (roots) will look for water sources and will prefer to stay where the moisture is.

Clumping Bamboo

Clumping bamboos do not spread by aggressive rhizomes like the runners do. These plants increase their clump size, like daylilies or other perennials, and need no special control. If it ever becomes a wider clump than you want, use a sharp, flat bladed shovel to cut straight down through the rhizomes. This may be done any time of year though late winter is less apt to shock the plant if you wish to replant the divisions. Barrier material is not needed due to the limited amount of spread each year.

BAMBOO CARE

Watering Bamboo

For newly planted bamboo, keep the soil moist but not soggy for the first two weeks. Too much water will cause excess leaf drop. In winter, the shorter daylight hours means the bamboo will use less water. However, rainfall or shallow watering may not reach the bottom of the root ball. Be sure to check for moisture below the top inches of the soil.

For the next two years, water deeply at least once or twice a week during warm-dry, light rain or cold-dry weather. Make sure the water is soaking into the roots, not just running off. Soaker hoses (or drip irrigation) grow healthier plants with less water. In later years, occasional deep watering during summer or fall dry spells should be sufficient in the Pacific Northwest.

If you notice leaves curling up, it is a sign of stress. Dryness is often the cause.

Fertilizing Bamboo

For newly planted bamboo, a root stimulator is recommended weekly for the first month to help establish the plant and reduce root shock. A lawn-type organic fertilizer may also be used because it slowly releases nitrogen. It will enhance soil life and allow proper root development. For the first and second year plants, use the same lawn-type fertilizer to encourage new shoot growth and general feeding. To encourage rhizomes to spread, apply the fertilizer in early fall. For the third year and after, fertilize only if you want increased vitality; otherwise compost will be sufficient.

Transplanting/Dividing Bamboo

Never divide or transplant bamboo while it is shooting (actively growing). Dig bamboo only in the winter—from late fall when all growth has stopped through very early spring before you see any signs of shooting.

Look for a clump of culms that has come up in the last year or so and which includes at least three or four healthy-looking culms. A good size for the clump would be at least two feet in diameter. You will need to sever the rhizomes and dig a large clump of root ball out of the ground. You may need to use a very sharp shovel, ax, or saw to separate the roots from the rest of the grove.

Bamboo rhizomes are physically tough, but they must not be allowed to dry out even for a few minutes. If you need to transport the division any distance, water both the roots and leaves well, wrap the whole thing in plastic, and get it into the ground as quickly as possible. Fertilize and keep watered as for any fresh bamboo planting.

The new division usually will not do much for the first few growing seasons. The first two years it will mostly be putting out roots in its new location. By the third year it will start putting out larger culms, and by the fourth or fifth should be putting out culms as large as that plant ever will in that specific location/conditions.

Pest Management

Bamboos grown in the U.S. have relatively few pests. Spider mites and aphids affect the appearance of the leaves, yet do not affect the vigor of the plant. Slugs, snails and large herbivores may do significant harm.

Spider Mites:

Older bamboo and those stressed by undesirable environmental conditions (ex. too much sun for a shade-lover or too little water) are more prone to mites. A few types of bamboo like the Sasas are by nature more susceptible. The outdoor bamboo mite (*Schizotetranychus celarius*) makes a fine web on the underside of the leaves and the upper surface will have a rectangular patch or multiple patches of light yellow-green to tan. Use horticultural oil on an overcast day so the leaves will not burn from the sun. Spray should be directed to the underside of the leaves.

Aphids:

These translucent, soft-bodied insects often show up in early summer. They will leave a sticky residue on the leaves which later turns to a sooty black film. This will remain until the leaves are shed the following year. You can reduce the aphid problem by pruning your bamboo to allow good air circulation. Also, spray the leaves with a strong jet of water for a few days and wait for predators like birds and ladybugs to do their work. Often the horticultural oil or insecticide soaps used for mites will also kill aphids. Check the label.

Snails or Slugs:

If you notice chewed out areas on new canes; slugs or snails are the likely culprits. Use one of the new animal and environmentally safe baits just as the new shoots appear.

Other Pests:

Herbivores such as goats, cows and horses find bamboo canes and leaves to be tasty so fence them out. Deer have not been a problem.

This information is courtesy of the Northwest Chapter of the American Bamboo Society and the Bamboo Gardens of Redmond.

BAMBOO VARIETIES**LARGE RUNNING BAMBOOS**

Phyllostachys aurea. GOLDEN BAMBOO.

Height 10-20 feet. Hardy to 0° F. Likes sun. Dense foliage—excellent screen or hedge plant. Tolerates drought, but looks better with regular water. Tolerates wind. Edible shoots. Does well in containers.

Phyllostachys aureosulcata. YELLOW GROOVE BAMBOO.

Height 15-25 feet. Hardy to -15° F. Likes sun. Vibrant green canes with yellow grooves. Shiny, dark green foliage; upright form. Occasional “kink” in lower canes. Tolerates wind. Edible shoots.

Phyllostachys nigra. BLACK BAMBOO.

Height 15-30 feet. Hardy to 0° F. Likes sun with afternoon shade. New culms green, turn black second year. Enjoy the black stems by “legging up” the canes. Edible shoots.

CLUMPING BAMBOOS

Fargesia robusta ROBUSTA FOUNTAIN BAMBOO.

Height 15-18 feet—spread 3-6 feet. Sun or shade; tolerates wind. Ideal for tall hedge or grove effect. Shiny, olive green leaves. Light colored cane sheaths make stunning checkerboard pattern against green shoots.

Fargesia rufa RUFA FOUNTAIN BAMBOO.

Height 7-8 feet—spread 5-6 feet. Hardy to -20° F. Likes sun or partial shade. Orange-red culm sheaths—1/2” culms. Perfect for small garden. Does well in containers.

Fargesia scabrida ASIAN WONDER FOUNTAIN BAMBOO.

Height 12-14 feet—spread 3-6 feet. Sun or shade. Ideal for hedge or specimen planting. Perhaps the most exciting colors of any hardy clumping bamboo: the young culms have dark orange sheaths, opening gradually to reveal steel-blue and lavender culms, aging to an olive green. The leaves are dark green and slender, with a graceful, airy arrangement.