

Bamboo may be for you

Don't be bamboozled. Bamboo is a lot more versatile than you think. Read on for the lowdown on its growing popularity and landscape uses.

By NANCY STAIRS

Bamboo may not be on your list of landscape plants to use or to recommend, either because it isn't supposed to grow in your area or, if it does, it spreads rapidly and can become a nuisance. But there are many different types of this evergreen plant, including those that grow well in temperate zones and those that do not spread:

- ▶ Tropical bamboo grow outdoors in frost-free areas, such as southern Florida, southern California and Hawaii.
- ▶ Subtropical bamboo are somewhat tolerant to frost. They grow well in USDA Zones 9 and 10 with marginal performance of some species in Zone 8. These hardier selections are suitable for areas like much of coastal California, the Gulf States and the tropical areas.
- ▶ The temperate bamboo are quite frost hardy. Some withstand temperatures to -20 F or USDA Zones 4 and 5.

Generally, tropical bamboos tend to be clumpers and the temperate tend to be runners. But there are some exceptions that add options to your landscaping palette. Bamboo can be used for erosion control, privacy or wind screens, as well as for its form and

Mixed grouping of running bamboos in pots with a small clumping bamboo (*Thamnocalamus*). Use a raised pot rim to control the spread of running bamboo. Check yearly to remove escaped runners.

Rules of bamboo

- 1) Don't crowd bamboo too close to a house, valuable plants, rock garden, etc. Keep a space around it that can be dug in; wide enough for you to walk through.
- 2) Thin bamboo regularly — take out all canes 4 years old and any that don't look good. Give new growth space to grow.
- 3) If using running bamboo and shoots

come up where you don't want them, cut them down deep in the ground with a narrow hoe-type tool. This will minimize regrowth and the sharp stubs that would result from using a lawn mower on shoots (which will not stop the spread of running bamboo).

- 4) Remember, running bamboo will infiltrate throughout, under and around, coming up where it can, so don't plant it

into a rock garden, next to a low deck or next to a patio.

- 5) In humid climates, bamboos planted next to rivers can be spread downstream by floods tearing off clumps. If you are introducing a species, choose wisely.

Source: From Northern Groves, Corvallis, OR; (541) 929-7152;
www.teleport.com/~dbrooks/bamboo.html

texture. The constant motion with the sound of rustling leaves is a bonus.

Growing up fast

Whether they run or clump, bamboo should be thought of as a colony, not as an individual plant. The canes ("culms") are supported by rhizomes (which makes sense when you realize 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 and put on new leaves each spring, dropping old leaves to the ground.

New canes emerge from rhizome nodes at their mature diameter. They grow rapidly for 40 to 60 days. When the new shoots reach their full height, they unfold their branches and leaves. On average, the canes will live anywhere from 5 to 10 years, although some species can live longer. As the bamboo grove matures, the height and diameter of the canes increases, so that the smaller canes are generally the older ones and the larger canes are the newer ones.

Bamboo are not very temperamental, like humidity and will grow in most soil types (except waterlogged) and in sun or shade, although shaded plants will not be as tall as sun-loving species. It generally takes three years for new bamboo plantings to produce multiple shoots and take on the appearance of a small grove. Water newly planted bamboos frequently.

Baby it's cold outside

Many bamboo species can survive colder temperatures but, as could be expected, bamboos grown in colder climates (for example, Zone 4) will not grow as tall as they will in warmer zones. In very extreme temperatures, bamboos can act like herbaceous perennials, losing leaves and stems to the ground level. Sometimes the canes will lose their leaves in cold temperatures but will put out new leaves in the spring. Sheltered plants will survive colder temperatures better than plants in open, windy sites. Growing bamboo in the Northeast or Northwest and even in the Midwest is possible.

Some recommendations from Northern Groves, Corvallis, OR; Tradewinds Bamboo Nursery, Gold Beach, OR; and The Bamboo Garden, Portland, OR; include some of the hardier, clumping bamboos. They generally do not appreciate extreme heat:

The Genus indicates whether a bamboo species is a runner or a clumper

CLUMPER

Bambusa
Chusquea
Dendrocalamus
Drepanostachyum
Fargesia
Himalayacalamus
Oatea
Thammocalamus

RUNNER

Chimonobambubusa
Indocalamus
Phyllostachys
Pleioblastus
Pseudosasa
Sasa
Semiarundinaria
Shibatea
Sinobambusa

SOURCE: TRADEWINDS BAMBOO NURSERY, GOLD BEACH, OR; 541/247-0835
WWW.HARBORSIDE.COM/BAMBOO/

► *Drepanostachyum hookerianum* (Striped Himalayan bamboo) — 30 ft.; 2 in. canes at maturity; 15°F; less hardy; best in milder climates; beautiful in gardens

► *Fargesia dracocephala* (Dragon's head bamboo) — to 16 ft., but generally less; to 0.75 in. canes at maturity; -10°F; almost weeping habit; forms dense clump, good for screening

► *Fargesia fungosa* (Cottonflower bamboo) — 20 ft.; 1 in. canes at maturity; 15°F; less hardy; best in milder climates

► *Fargesia muriele* (Umbrella bamboo) — 12-15 ft.; 0.5 in. canes at maturity; -20°F; also called *Thammocalamus spathaceus* or *Sinarundinaria muriele*; weeping habit; delicate appearance; looks best out of direct sun

► *Fargesia nitida* (Fountain bamboo) — 12 ft.; 0.5 in. canes at maturity; -20°F; less robust than *F. muriele* or *F. utilis*, but hardier and more drought tolerant and most available; best in partial shade; many other varieties

► *Fargesia utilis* — 13 ft. estimated; 0.75 in. canes at maturity; 0°F; fastest *Fargesia* to get large; good in cool, moist microclimate

The subtropical clumping bamboo, which are hardy enough to grow in unheated atriums in the Pacific Northwest and to mild Zone 8 for outdoor planting:

► *Bambusa multiplex rivierorum* — 6 ft.; 0.25 in. canes at maturity; 15°F; also good for indoors

► *Bambusa multiplex* "Silverstripe" — 45 ft.; 1.5 in. canes at maturity; 15°F; a full-sized form of the preceding species. **LM**