

## BAMBOO

**B**amboo is a highly diverse group of woody-stemmed grasses. They are members of the Poaceae or Gramineae Family. This is the Grass Family and Bamboo belongs to the subfamily *Bambusoideae*. There are over 100 species of bamboo ranging in size from dwarf specimens growing only a few inches tall to giants that reach over 100 feet tall and have canes over 12 inches in diameter. Bamboos also inhabit a wide range of climates ranging from lowland tropical rainforests, to cold mountainsides. Bamboo is native to every continent except Europe and Antarctica. There is even one species native to the United States. Switchcane, *Arundinaria gigantea*, is native to a wide region of the eastern U.S., from southern Ohio to Maryland to eastern Texas. In Florida, it can be found wild as far south as Osceola County. It is a reedy bamboo growing 4 to 6 feet tall on a slender cane.

In Central Florida, there are many bamboos that can be used in the landscape. Bamboo can be used for screening, informal hedges, groundcovers, or as a specimen. Typically, there are two types of bamboo; clumpers and runners. Clumping bamboo is the most desired type for the garden. It forms behaved clumps that do not rapidly spread out and take over. New culms are produced only several inches away from the old culms. A majority of the clumping type bamboos are subtropical and tropical and are the desired specimens for Central Florida. The runners are the type that has given

bamboo a bad reputation. This type of bamboo spreads by running rhizomes and can send new shoots many feet away from the main clump. These kinds of bamboo spread rapidly and can become a real nuisance.

Bamboo is very easy to grow. Most prefer full sun or light shade. Some of the smaller growing species need a shaded location. Most bamboo are not very drought tolerant. They like an evenly moist soil that is well drained. They are also heavy feeders and can be fertilized several times a year. They are not picky about fertilizers; a good general fertilizer will suffice, like a 6-6-6 or an 8-8-8 mix.



*Citrus limon* 'Variegated Pink Eureka' - Pink Lemon

Since bamboo is a type of grass you can also use a turf fertilizer with a higher nitrogen content. Just make sure not to use a turf fertilizer with an herbicide included in it.

There are many species of the genus *Bambusa* that grow well in Central Florida. All species of *Bambusa* are clumping. *B. chungii*, Tropical Blue Bamboo, grows 30' tall with 2" diameter

canes. The canes have a powdery white material that gives it a pale blue coloring. It is native to southern China. *B. lako*, Timor Black Bamboo, grows 50 to 70' tall with 4" diameter canes.

The canes are purple-black with light green stripes. It is native to Timor, Indonesia. This bamboo is tender to cold and better suited to the warmer sections of Central Florida. *B. malingensis*, Maling Bamboo, grows 35' tall with 2"-3" diameter canes. It forms thick, tight clumps and produces many canes each year. This is also one of the few bamboos that has salt tolerance and grows well near the coast. It is native to southern China. *B. mutabilis* grows 20-25 feet tall and has 2" diameter canes. The canes are very straight and upright. It is native to Hainan Island, China. *B. oldhamii* can grow 50'-60' tall with 4" diameter canes. It is a large, spectacular bamboo with erect, straight canes and few side branches. The leaves are quite large. It is native to southern China and Taiwan. *B. textilis*, Weaver's Bamboo, grows to 40' tall with 2" diameter canes. This bamboo has very straight canes that arch at the very top and is native to southern China. *B. textilis* var. *gracilis* is a smaller variety only growing 20-30' tall and the canes are only 1½" in diameter. The leaves are also much smaller in size. *B. ventricosa*, Buddha's Belly Bamboo, grows 60-70' tall with 2"-3" diameter canes. This is a very common bamboo in Florida. If this bamboo is kept in a container, it becomes dwarf and the internodes are swollen, thus its' common name. It is widely used as a bonsai subject. If planted in the ground, the new canes will eventually lose the swollen internodes and it becomes a large, thick clump with zig-zag branches and canes. It is





native to southern China. *B. vulgaris*, Common Timber Bamboo, grows 50' tall with 4" diameter canes. This is a very common

bamboo in central and southern Florida and throughout the tropics. This large timber bamboo forms open clumps with the canes sometimes being spaced up to a foot apart. It is most likely native to southeastern Asia but is found only in cultivation. It is tender to cold and better suited to the warmer regions of central Florida. This bamboo has two ornamental cultivars. The cultivar 'Vittata' has golden yellow canes with green stripes. The cultivar 'Wamin' only grows 10'-15' tall with 3" diameter canes. This bamboo has swollen internodes on the lower half of the canes.

*Bambusa multiplex*, Hedge Bamboo, is very well suited to Central Florida. It grows 20 to 25' tall and has 1-2" diameter canes. It forms a dense clump and makes an excellent screen. It is native to southern China. Hedge Bamboo is very common in Florida. There are several cultivars with differing characteristics that make excellent landscape specimens. 'Alphonse Karr' has yellow stems with green stripes. 'Fernleaf' is a smaller form growing 10-15' tall. The leaves are small and fern-like with thin, green stems. 'Fernleaf Stripedstem' is similar except the thin stems are yellow with green stripes. 'Golden Goddess' grows to about 10' tall with 1/2" diameter canes that are

greenish-yellow. 'Riviereorum', often called Chinese Goddess Bamboo, only grows 5-6' tall with 1/2" canes. 'Silverstripe' grows 20-25' tall and often has silver stripes on the leaves. 'Tiny Fern' only grows 2-3' tall.

The genus *Dendrocalamus* contains mostly larger growing timber bamboos. Most are only slightly cold hardy and are more suited the warmer regions of central Florida. *D. asper* Grows to 100' tall with 8" diameter canes. This is one of the largest bamboo species in cultivation. It forms large and impressive clumps. The new canes are covered with soft gray hairs that are soft to the touch. It is native to southeastern Asia. *D. giganteus* is the largest species of bamboo. It can grow to 120' tall and has canes that can reach over 12" in diameter. It is native to southeastern Asia. *D. minor* 'Amoenus' is a smaller species only growing 25' tall with 2" canes. The canes are green with dark green stripes and it is native to southeastern Asia.

Mexican Weeping Bamboo, *Otatea acuminata* ssp. *aztecorum* is one of the best bamboos for Florida. It grows 10 to 20' tall and has a graceful weeping habit. It also has soft, narrow leaves. The canes grow 1-2" in diameter. This bamboo is also fairly drought tolerant

and is native to eastern Mexico. *Thyrsostachys siamensis*, Monastery Bamboo, also has soft, graceful foliage. It grows 30-40' tall and has 2-3" diameter canes. It is native to Thailand.

There are several running type bamboos that grow well here and are not as aggressive. These are easily controlled. Several of these are smaller and make good groundcovers or erosion control.

*Indocalamus tessellatus* is a hardy bamboo that grows 4'-5' tall with 1/2"

canes. This small bamboo forms running clumps. It prefers a shaded location in Central Florida. It has the largest leaves of all bamboos, up to 2' long and 4" wide. It is native to western and central China. *Phyllostachys nigra*, Black Bamboo, grows 20 to 30" tall with 3" diameter canes. The canes turn from green to black after a year or so. This bamboo does best in some shade species. It is native to eastern China. *Pleioblastus pygmaeus*, Pygmy Bamboo, is the smallest of all bamboos. It only grows 1 to 2 inches tall and makes a thick groundcover. It resembles a lawn grass more than a bamboo. Pygmy Bamboo needs a shady location to look its best. It is native to Japan. *Pseudosasa japonica*, Arrow Bamboo, grows to about 10' tall. The slender stems are very straight and dense growing. It is native to Japan and Korea. The cultivar 'Tsumiana', Green Onion Bamboo, has swollen internodes.

– Eric Schmidt

## FLOWERING IN BAMBOO

Flowering in most bamboo species is a rare but fatal event. A majority of bamboo lives 40 to 100 years before it begins the flowering cycle. The inflorescences of bamboo are not very showy. Once the plant flowers it often sets seed. A single clump of bamboo can produce thousands of seeds. After the seed is produced, the plant usually dies.

Here at Leu Gardens we currently have a clump of *Bambusa ventricosa*, Buddha's Belly Bamboo that is flowering. This is the large clump of bamboo that is next to the Landing near the Floral Clock. No one really knows what triggers the flowering in bamboo. Perhaps it was stressed from the three hurricanes that passed in 2004. Stop by and observe a rare event of nature.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

#### Books

*Bamboo for Gardens* by Ted Jordan Meredith, 2001, Timber Press

*Bamboo World* by Victor Cusak, 2001, Kangaroo Press

#### Internet

American Bamboo Society:

[www.americanbamboo.org/](http://www.americanbamboo.org/)

Florida/Caribbean Chapter of ABS:

[www.tropicalbamboo.org/](http://www.tropicalbamboo.org/)