



## **A BRIEF GUIDE TO BAMBOO CULTIVATION**

### **Bamboos**

The bamboo is in the same family as grasses.

They are evergreen but do shed their leaves to some extent during the winter/early spring.

Some exhibit a natural characteristic, which is to hold their brown leaves until spring.

They vary in height from 12 inches (30cm) up to 30ft (10 mtr).

The spread and height cannot be defined accurately due to soil, moisture, nutrient and climatic considerations.

For outdoor cultivation in the UK only the temperate/hardy species should be grown. They are extremely hardy and for planted out specimens will survive many degrees below freezing.

They are grown for the many attributes they exhibit and add an extra dimension to any garden. They provide a vertical/architectural element, movement, screening, coloured culms/canes and a variation of leaf forms.

They can look good in all gardens, and with care in the choice of type bought, can be used as; single specimens, groups, ground cover, hedging and in containers. They can add a tropical feel or compliment other plantings.

There are two distinct groups that must be considered when choosing a bamboo for your garden.

They are Clump forming and Running bamboos.

### **Clump Forming Bamboo**

These produce roots (rhizomes) that are relatively short and thick that terminate in a single new shoot or culm. These plants tend not to invade the area due to this form of growth.

### **Running Bamboo**

These can rapidly colonize an area due to their rhizomes being longer and producing buds at intervals that throw up new culms at each bud.

## **Preparation and Planting**

As a general rule improve the soil with bulky rotted organic matter. This will improve both light and heavy soils, opening up the heavy ones while helping to retain moisture in the light ones.

The addition of grit/coarse sand to heavy soils will also help improve drainage.

An application of a general fertilizer, (Vitax Q4, Blood, Fish & Bone) will also be of benefit.

Before planting out from pots, always start by giving them a good watering. Tease out some of the roots from the root ball to encourage rooting out.

Planting depth should be slightly lower than the top of the root ball. Firm in and water well, then mulch to retain moisture and discourage weeds.

It can take bamboo plants several months to establish and during that time some leaves may turn yellow or brown, this is natural and nothing to worry about.

To restrain the tendency of bamboos to become invasive a root barrier can be used. This entails using landscape fabric buried at an angle to encircle the plant. Alternatively the growth/spread of the plant can be restricted by snapping off the new culms by hand, by mower or by strimmer. If this is done when they are young then re-growth will not occur.

## **Growing in Pots**

Bamboos grow well in pots or tubs or in pots sunk into the ground.

The best bamboos for this purpose are the smaller growing species.

To grow bamboos in pots it is essential to maintain good growing conditions with regard to water and food. It is quite likely that a plant will fill its pot with roots within two years and then be in danger of drying out showing severe browning and in the worst case almost certain death.

For potting, re-potting or top-dressing use a soil based compost with the addition of slow release fertilizer pellets. We use our own multi purpose compost with added loam and Osmocote.

Re-potting or dividing of bamboos when they get root bound is best done in early summer when they can re-establish good root growth.

## **Problems, Pests & Diseases**

Bamboos suffer from remarkably few troubles.

Occasionally aphids will cover the undersides of the leaves, a spray with an insecticide will quickly remove them.

Slugs can also be a problem with the newly emerging shoots, slug pellets work well.

Diseases are rare and should not cause a problem.

Flowering can be a rare occurrence but when it happens it is likely that all plants of a specific variety will flower together. They may flower heavily for many years, which can weaken the plants and may even cause death. The collection of seed and subsequent sowing to raise new plants from these plants is possible.

However it is advisable to cut all flowering canes to ground level, feed plants with a high nitrogen fertilizer, water in well and mulch to retain moisture.

With this extra T.L.C. plants can be nursed through this stressful period.