

# TOM'S BAMBOO

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Care I nstructions

BAMBOO, THE GIANT GRASS. With over 1000 species worldwide, you'll easily find a bamboo for your every need. Large leaf or small, short plants or tall, there is a bamboo for every corner of your garden.

## **MORPHOLOGY**

Bamboos are not trees and they are not bushes. They are grasses and they grow as such. A culm that grows in year one will never get any taller or any bigger around in each succeeding year. It will continue to branch out and add more foliage each year. If the plant is adequately watered and fed, then the culms in year two will generally be bigger and taller than year one. This will continue through each year until the full potential of the plant is reached.

## **PURCHASING**

When purchasing, look for a container grown plant as there should be no root damage due to transplant shock. Look for strong well-colored leaves which prove the general health of the plant. Remember that you are really buying the roots, or rhizomes; that is where the future of the plant lies. As long as there are strong looking shoots, or culms, the plant will do well in your garden.

## **SITING**

Choose a spot with moderate to full sun in a rich soil that holds moisture. Most bamboos do not well in boggy wet areas as the roots will rot. In a courtyard, along a walkway, as a backdrop to other plants, or as a hedge or screen are a few of the preferred ways to utilize bamboo. It goes well with rhododendrons and azaleas and other long-leaved bushes as the plants' leaves mimic one another.

## **PLANTING**

It is important to start with a hole twice the width of the root ball. If the soil is clayey then you'll need to dig a larger area in order to loosen soil. Bamboo is a shallowly rooted plant so it needs space to spread out. Soak the hole with water and let it drain before placing the root ball into the center of the hole. Backfill the hole with compost, well rotted manure, or bags of steer manure purchased from your nursery. Soak again, then finish backfilling to a slightly dished crown. Water daily to insure a good start and lessen transplant shock.

## **MULCH, MULCH MULCH**

Mulch at planting time. Spread lawn clippings around the plant during the spring and summer. Bamboo is a grass and welcomes the nitrogen in lawn clippings. In fall spread a thick layer of leaves around the base of the plant to protect the shallow rhizomes from freezing. Mulch will also aid in water retention, giving you more top growth.

## **FREEZING**

Most bamboos can take short periods of freezing (1-2 weeks) with no apparent damage if they are well mulched. But for longer periods of freezing (1-3 months) some bamboo tops will die back. The biggest danger is to potted bamboos as dehydration will seriously weaken or kill the plants unless moisture is supplied. While full winter sun and frost are hard on the foliage, heavy layers of snow will protect the plant from drying out. The shoots, or culms, are quite elastic and will spring upright when the snow is gone.

## **FERTILITZING**

Bamboos are heavy feeders. Compost and manure are the best fertilizers as they provide nutrients and humus which aids in water retention. In the spring a handful of granulated lawn fertilizer high in nitrogen, but not weed and feed, is an excellent addition around each plant. When the rain soaks it in, add another handful until the new culms start to appear. At this point allow the growth to proceed naturally. When the culms reach their full height and the branches and foliage are extended, a more balanced fertilizer is the best addition to the plant. Stop fertilizing in the early fall to allow the plant to harden off before winter. Use yard clippings all summer long as mulch, the organic material slowly breaks down while adding valuable nutrients to the soil. Soaker hoses or drip irrigation is an excellent way to insure that adequate moisture is available to the plant throughout the growing season.

## **CONTAINMENT**

If concerned about the spread of bamboo there are three easy strategies you can adopt. Most bamboos are slow spreaders in northern climates. The first is the easiest, keep feeding and watering your plants. The reason bamboos spread is to search for food and water. By feeding and watering your plant you'll encourage it to stay put. The second strategy is to simply take a spade and dig around the plant in late summer and sever any rhizomes that it is sending out. The third strategy is to dig a trench around the plant to a depth of 16-20". Place into the trench an impregnable barrier such as 30 mil. root

barrier or similar material. When the rhizomes reach the barrier and attempt to go over it you can then sever them or redirect them back into the plant.

### **INDOOR PLANTINGS**

Bamboos can be grown indoors. It will never produce the growth that it would outside under more ideal conditions. The biggest problem is lack of moisture in the root ball and leaves due to the drier air inside the house. Keep the plant well watered and in a light sunny location. Always look for larger leaved specimens because they can survive in low light.

### **PROPOGATION**

Most successful propagation is by division. Divide plants into quarters or thirds being careful not to sever rhizomes in the outside of the clump as this is where the new growth occurs. Transplant immediately without letting the roots dry out at an identical depth. The more a plant is transplanted the longer it will take to reach its full potential, as each transplanting sets the plant back a year or two. Be patient. Bamboos reach adult size only after two years to culture for the dwarfs, three to five years for the small ones, five to six years for the average sizes, and ten to twelve years for the giants.