

# TOM'S BAMBOO

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## Pruning

Spring is the perfect time for the trimming, pruning and feeding of your bamboo plants.

Remember bamboos are grasses not trees or bushes, so they grow differently. Any cane now in the plant will never get any bigger; it will only put on more leaves. So now is the time to thin and prune in order to enhance future growth.

The rule of thumb of bamboo thinning is to remove the dead, the small, and the ugly. Any dead canes or branches should be cut off now. Cut close to the ground for the cane or close to the cane for a branch in order to not leave any unsightly or dangerous stubs. A sharp pair of pruners for the branches or small canes, or a fine toothed saw, a hacksaw is perfect, for the larger canes will insure a smooth cut and finish. Remember when cutting bamboo that sharp tools are a must.

Brown tipped leaves will be replaced by the plant itself naturally so you only need to be concerned with the dead wood. Once the dead canes have been removed, it's time to remove the small canes. On young plants (one or two years in the ground) I leave all canes in order to help root growth along. But on established plants or groves I pick a minimum size and remove any canes smaller than that. I remove up to one quarter of all the canes. This sends a message to the plant that smaller canes will not be tolerated so don't bother sending any up. Surprisingly enough the plant will respond to this message and will concentrate its efforts on producing larger canes.

After removing the dead and small it's time to remove the ugly. This is totally your call any canes that are in the way or that are sprawling or any that bother you in any way, now is the time to remove them. If you don't like it whack it. This step is totally subjective and no second guessing is allowed.

So now that we have alive, healthy, beautiful canes, let's show them off. We are going to cut off all of the branches on the canes from the ground up to 1/3 to 1/2 of the height of the cane. This pruning will give the effect of a larger mature grove to a smaller grove and will allow some light to reach the surface of the ground in order to warm the soil, important in our northern climate. Be sure to trim the branches off close to the cane

and don't leave stubs. This is the finishing touch to the pruning job and allows you to fully enjoy the color of the canes and the play of light among them.

After pruning it's time to lay down the cutting tools and feed the plants. A generous application of steer manure or compost and a generous dusting of bulb food or bone meal will feed both the leaves and the roots. And a good soaking, I don't care that it is raining, will insure that these much needed nutrients will reach the roots. Spring watering is important for bigger shoots and greener growth, so water deeply (6").

And to protect that water and keep it around the roots mulch, mulch, mulch. Grass clippings are preferred as they easily break down while releasing nutrients to the roots.

A little trim, a little prune, a little feed, and a little water and your bamboo looks better and is healthier.