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All About Bamboo

Information Sheet

Bamboo is a versatile and important part of the economy and culture in many countries. Here at Wide World Importers, we import a variety of home décor products made from bamboo. But if you want to add a tropical flair to your garden as well as in your home, try planting one or several of the many varieties of bamboo used for landscaping.

There are two different categories of bamboo plants to consider, depending on the look you want to achieve and the amount of maintenance you're prepared to do: running and clumping. The running varieties send out underground runners which can show up far from the parent plant. The underground runners can be easily contained either by using the trench-and-barrier method described below. Runners are ideal for hedges or screens. Clumping bamboos have very short root systems, expanding no more than a few inches per year. They are less cold-hardy than runners, but make excellent specimen plants.

# Moving to a New Home

Bamboo plants grow best in a moderately acidic loamy soil. Bamboo is natively a forest plant, and grows best when mulch is kept over the roots and rhizomes. Grass makes a good mulch, because it's high in nitrogen and silica, as do chipped trees, bark, and straw. Bamboo can be planted any time of the year in areas with mild climates. A newly planted bamboo requires frequent and liberal watering, twice a week or more often during hot or windy weather.

To control spread of any of the running bamboo varieties, dig a trench that is at least 30 inches wide and 30 inches deep around the area that you want the newly planted bamboo to occupy. Line the trench with a polyethylene bamboo barrier, and fill the lined trench with gravel. Tightly compact the soil next to the barrier to discourage deep rhizome growth.

# Staying Healthy

* Do not rake or sweep the bamboo leaves from under the plant, as they provide an effective mulch to keep the soil soft and moist.
* If you dig a trench to control running bamboo varieties, examine the trench each fall to determine whether any rhizomes have tried to cross it. If so, cut them off.
* Stake tall and slender bamboos.
* In the spring, excessive yellowing of the leaves and leaf drop are normal for the growth cycle.

# Keeping Bugs at Bay

## Mites

Bamboo mites, not to be confused with spider mites, cause stippling with yellowish centers throughout the leaf of the plant. With magnification, you can see the webbing and the mites themselves on the underside of the leaves, which is where they prefer to suck the juice from. The main problem with mites is visual. For minor infestations, it's possible to control by spraying with insecticidal soap or an approved miticide.

## Mealy Bugs

These can be an occasional problem on clumping varieties of bamboo, and can be controlled by injecting dimethoate directly in the culm. If you prefer not to use this method, you can try submersing the entire plant (assuming it is potted) in water for 12-24 hours; long enough to kill the bugs but not long enough to harm the plant. Because bamboo is native to floodplains, the plants are able to tolerate immersion fairly well.