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Fast Growing Cold Hardy Bamboo In America

By Pat Malcolm

Running Bamboo is the most widely grown, fast growing type of bamboo plant in the world, and is

comprised of over 700 species. The most widely used and possibly the 'King' of the running bamboo in the Phyllostachys genus, which is comprised of approximately 80 species. The most fast growing, popular bamboo species are Phyllostachys aurea (Golden Bamboo or Fishing Pole Bamboo); Phyllostachys bambusoides (Giant Timber Bamboo); Phyllostachys nigra (Black Bamboo); Phyllostachys nigra 'henonis' (Blue Bamboo); Phyllostachys pubescens (Moso Bamboo); and Phyllostachys sulphurea (Robert Young Bamboo). Golden Bamboo or fishing pole bamboo plants, as they are called in the south, have a light-green to golden colored stalk, that grow fast to ½ - 2 inches in diameter, and up to a 30 feet tall with similar colored leaves and poles. Golden Bamboo was the first of the Phyllostachys bamboo cultivars to be introduced into the United States, in 1882. In Alabama, where bamboo was to be primarily used as a fast growing windbreak, it was planted by southern tobacco farmers. The poles from the golden bamboo have probably landed more fish in the southeastern U.S. than any other means of fishing, hence the name, fishing pole bamboo, Phyllostachys aurea. Giant Timber bamboo has dark green to golden stalks that grow large to 100 feet tall, and up to 6 inch poles in diameter with green foliage. A popular known grown bamboo is Japanese timber bamboo, Phyllostachys bambusoides, because of its introduction from Japan in the 1910's. This giant timber bamboo was expected to be a huge commercial success by the U.S.D.A. for its use in erosion and construction, and for its nutritious edible shoots. The possible uses as a renewable U.S. Forest bamboo tree product has never been exploited, due to the resistance and opposition of the powerful U.S. Lumber Industry, and lobby, which had its investments planted into the vast non-renewable pine and oak forests that once existed in the lower half of North America.

Black bamboo, Phyllostachys nigra, is fast growing with a shiny, green stalk, that changes into a dark-purple or black color over the period of approximately 18 months. The black bamboo culms (stalks) are 1 - 2 inches in diameter and grow to reach a pole height of 30 feet with the beautiful contrast of green leaves. Black bamboo has for centuries, and still today, been considered in China and Japan to be the "Crown Jewel" of the bamboo world. Emperors and aristocrats alike adorn their private gardens with this choice black bamboo species. Black bamboo is highly regarded for cabinet work and a must for the coffins of wealthy oriental families, a symbol of beauty and success. Black bamboo typically brings the highest dollar to buy at garden centers for its unparalleled ornamental

beauty.

Blue Bamboo, *Phyllostachys nigra* 'Henon', also known as the Henon Bamboo, or *Phyllostachys nigra* 'Henon'. Henon Bamboo, however, is larger than black bamboo, with pole stalks reaching 3 ½ inches in diameter and a height of over 50 feet. The Blue Henon bamboo stalk is light–green in color, but after time builds up a hazy layer of silicon on the surface, that gives a grayish–blue appearance. The Blue Henon bamboo color is contrasted by its green leaves. Known as Blue bamboo, due to this silicon build–up, blue Henon bamboo is like its relative, black bamboo, rare and highly prized. Blue Henon bamboo is typically grown for its ornamental value only.

Moso Bamboo (*Phyllostachys pubescens*) is the most valued commercially used bamboo species in the world with millions of acres in use. Moso bamboo pole stalks are considered among the biggest and most beautiful, growing to a diameter from 3 - 7 inches and towering to 80 feet with clusters of relatively small green leaves. The possible uses of Moso bamboo seems endless, ranging from food,

construction material, paper, irrigation, medicine, musical instruments, beer, even diesel fuel. Yes, if the "powers that be" would allow, this bamboo might be used to change the economy of the world and the lives of billions. Moso bamboo is considered to be of infinite beauty, growing huge, arching culms swaying in the wind, growing with masses of tiny leaves to gives the image of giant pale–green ostrich plumes. This beautiful visual effect has recently caught the admiring attention of millions of viewers in Hollywood productions, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Last Samurai*, and other films from bamboo plants growing in the forests of China. The rare, highly sought after abnormal forms of Moso bamboo with pot–bellies on internodes in tight clusters; Sometimes slanting nodes, or even in zig–zag deformities are interesting. These Moso bamboo poles are called 'Tortoise–shell' bamboo, and are highly prized to buy and grow for their use in expensive handcrafts or furniture. Moso bamboo, as all species, is a renewable resource, and the new moso bamboo plants regenerate from the roots after cutting. Therefore, if grown as a source for paper products, Moso bamboo could rival the lumber industry in power today, and would be more compatible to our environment.

Robert Young Bamboo, *Phyllostachys sulphurea*, is also a very large bamboo, with golden stalks of green pin–stripes topped with dense green leaves. The pole stalks grow from 2 - 6 inches in diameter and grow up to 50 feet tall. Robert Young Bamboo is named after its discover and is predominantly used as an ornamental variety only.

The running bamboo species spread by underground rhizomes that extend into a 360 degree growth pattern, and can grow indefinitely. The roots are, however, shallow (only 1 ½ - 2 feet deep) and may be largely controlled by root barriers made of thick gauge plastic or concrete units. Hotels and private patios around the world, plant and grow these prized ornamental bamboo in terracotta or cement planters. This bamboo growing method does restrict the bamboo plant's ability to reach its potential maximum large size. Running bamboo species are widely planted for fast growing erosion control, privacy screens, and wind breaks, and the bamboo can be trimmed to the desired height. Bamboo in general is not particular concerning soil type, although a neutral soil (pH = 7) is preferred. Bamboo can also tolerate full sun or partial shade conditions. Despite misconceptions, bamboo culms (stalks) emerge largely in the spring with a consistent diameter that each individual pole stalk will always have. Each year, as the bamboo root mass grows larger and stronger, larger and larger culms will emerge

until it grows to that particular species' maximum diameter.

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How to Grow Bamboo

By Hans Dekker

How to Grow Bamboo by Hans Dekker

Bamboo is a mysterious and elusive plant that baffles taxonomists who try to contain it within a botanical class and gardeners who try to contain it within a limited garden space as they learn how to grow bamboo. For many years, bamboo was thought to be a primitive grass but recent DNA testing has shown it to be one of the most highly evolved forest grasses. There are over 1200 forms of bamboo that grow in a broad spectrum of color including the familiar green and gold as well as burgundy, blue and even black grasses. Some varieties of bamboo can grow up to a foot a day and ultimately reach 130 feet tall while the smallest bamboo cultivar attains only six inches of growth.

The first step in learning how to grow bamboo is picking a cultivar and beginning to unravel its many mysteries. While most of us picture tall stands of green and golden canes growing in tropical bamboo forests, bamboo cultivars range from the temperate to the tropical. As well as diversity in cultivar, bamboo has over 1500 documented uses that range from use in construction to the making of acupuncture needles and from agricultural fodder to the making of musical instruments. Until they are cut, bamboos stems are properly called culms and not canes. In India bamboo plants are commonly called the "Wood of the poor" and in China the "friend of the people". To add to the confusion, a cultivar commonly sold as "lucky bamboo" isn't bamboo at all but a type of lily from the *Dracaena* family!

Unluckily for bamboo, it has the reputation for being an invasive plant, growing from running rhizomes. Although this is true for some cultivars, the most cold-hardy plants don't run at all, but grow from well-behaved clumps with well-established root systems. One thing that bamboo cultivars do have in common is that they are perennial plants. As noted above, some bamboos varieties are temperate and some are tropical. Because its diversity, it's easy to find a suitable cultivar when you want to learn how to grow bamboo. Bamboo cultivars range from those that grow indoors to outdoors, in a garden or in a container, in bright light or shade.

Two considerations in knowing how to grow bamboo successfully are water and air. All true bamboos are grasses and won't grow in saturated soils. They also need air circulation to thrive. In fact, some bamboo growers raise the pots of their small cultivars on chopsticks to provide air circulation under the plant as well as around it. Large pots are often elevated with heavy dowels.

The bamboo is a symbol of long life, strength and versatility for many cultures of the world. Unraveling its mysteries is a continuing source of enjoyment. When you know how to grow bamboo, you'll find that

your love for the plant grows as fast as your bamboo does!

Gardener and owner of

Gardening-Guides.com"

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