

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 6-02-04) Bamboo, ©2005

Bamboo is one of those love it or hate it plants. Today's column gives tips for both categories. Let's start with the good features of bamboo. It's a primitive grass and all bamboo is evergreen. Phil Davidson of Jade Mountain Bamboo Nursery in Tacoma says, "You don't have to have a green thumb to take care of it."

Bamboo falls into two categories – clumping and running varieties. It's an evergreen but some bamboo dies down to the ground during winter. Like all evergreen plants it loses about one third of its leaves in the spring. Bamboo likes a cold season to flourish. Most of the new growth occurs in the winter and is soil temperature dependent. The canes of black bamboo can grow as much as fourteen inches in a day. Growth slows down when temperatures drop. Most larger size bamboo takes three years to establish following the "first year sleep, second year creep and third year leap" habit of growth.

Bamboo makes a perfect container plant outdoors but serves well as a houseplant too. As a houseplant it needs some cold exposure part of each year. When selecting bamboo consider the following questions: how tall, what color and how fast does it spread? Then you'll be able to decide whether you want to try this plant in your own garden.

Phil Davidson says, "Bamboo is beautiful and exotic; sounds nice with the wind in its leaves; comes in lots of colors and designs; enriches the soil with oxygen; provides shade to cut cooling costs; provides privacy screens; conceals unsightly views; can slow the wind in heavy storms; binds the soil to slow erosion; provides edible shoots and materials for crafts; can reduce the area of grass to mow and after the first year is virtually maintenance free."

To study the numerous choices in bamboos Bamboo Gardens of Washington at <http://www.bamboogardenswa.com>; Jade Mountain Bamboo Nursery [www.jademountainbamboo.com](http://www.jademountainbamboo.com); [www.AmericanBamboo.org](http://www.AmericanBamboo.org); and [www.bamboopeople.com](http://www.bamboopeople.com) are a few websites to peruse. You might also want to attend a meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Bamboo Society. The chapter contact is Dean Hines in Snohomish, phone 360-668-3923, email [deanhines@aol.com](mailto:deanhines@aol.com).

Jeff Leonard, King County Master Gardener, Bamboo Specialist and CPH (Certified Professional Horticulturist, WSNLA) will be in Kitsap County on Wednesday, July 21, at the Eagle's Nest on Fairgrounds Road (across from the Pavilion) from 1-3 p.m. The event is sponsored by the Master Gardener Foundation of Kitsap County and WSU Extension. Admission is free but donations are gladly accepted.

Several of our local nurseries carry bamboo. Bill and Rosanne Newton in Keyport have "Not Just Bamboo" nursery. You can contact them at 360-830-5299 for nursery hours and driving directions. You'll also want to journey to Tacoma to visit Jade Mountain Bamboo at 5020 116<sup>th</sup> Street East. Call the nursery at 253-548-1129.

What if you have bamboo you want to eradicate? First make sure it's bamboo and not the noxious weeds in the Knotweed family. You'll be able to tell the difference by the size of the leaves. Knotweed has large soft green leaves. Bamboo leaves are narrow and grass-like. When in doubt contact your favorite local nursery for identification or the WSU Extension Office at 715 Sidney weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Jeff Leonard says, "Bamboo is controllable but very difficult to eradicate entirely, especially if established in a moist area or wetland." He says, "Rhizomes run in the fall and without water and nutrients the bamboo will stay in one place without running. With lack of water and nutrients the bamboo will continue to grow in a clump (or stand). Attempt first to reduce the water in the summer and do not fertilize or fertilize very weakly."

"Elbow grease is the best herbicide and remember to sharpen your shovel, it will save you hours of digging," says Jeff. "You can run around a stand or clump of bamboo with a rototiller to disturb the roots, but you'll need to make absolutely sure you've gotten all the rhizomes because even the smallest piece will grow a new bamboo." Jeff explains you can sometimes follow a whole rhizome to the end, pulling bit by bit as you go. Grab a shoot and pull slowly following the rhizome to the end. There is also a tool called the "bamboo slammer." "It will save you hours of digging," he says. Jeff reminds that bamboo usually grows in the top 15-18 inches of soil. Make sure you dig down that deep at least to get all the particles.

In spite of the bad reputation sometimes given to bamboo, both Jeff and Phil agree it's a very worthy, useful and decorative plant for our Northwest Gardens. Do some research, visit several nurseries, ask questions and decide for yourself.

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