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# Bamboo

Bamboo is a long-lived, woody-stemmed perennial grass that is usually evergreen if grown in a climate to which it is adapted. The term bamboo refers to plants of the large subfamily of Bambusoideae within the family Poaceae (the grass family). Bamboos are a diverse plant group ranging from those that grow only a few inches in height with to giants that can attain over 100 feet with trunk-like stems. Some are cold tolerant (USDA Hardiness Zone 5) while others are frost sensitive. Worldwide, there are approximately 45 genera and over 1,200 bamboo species. The most common are in southeast Asia, China and Japan. Asian bamboo is harvested for food, paper and timber. In the United States, bamboo is usually grown as an ornamental.

There are three reasons to like bamboo. First, it creates a visual appeal that is cool, shady, and tropical. Second, in the slightest breeze, it has a soothing rustling sound – leaves are brushing and canes are clacking – it has a peaceful white noise that adds to the visual appeal. Third, the canes can be thinned out and trimmed up to create useful garden stakes and trellis poles.

Bamboo species are characterized as either “clumping” or “running”. All bamboos spread by underground stems called rhizomes. Clumping types have much shorter rhizomes causing them to spread much more slowly. Running types produce long, vigorous rhizomes that can invade adjacent areas, especially where regularly irrigated. Clumping bamboos are easy to manage in the landscape. Running types should be contained using a root barrier constructed of either concrete or thick polyethylene material designed for that use. Root barriers should be at least 30 inches deep. Routine maintenance and inspection of root barriers for escaped running bamboo is highly recommended. Running bamboos often find their way past the barrier material and into adjacent lawns and other regularly irrigated areas.

Bamboos come in a range of heights, leaf sizes, stem diameters, and stem colors. Most areas of Yavapai County are limited to cold hardy bamboo species. Several bamboo species can withstand winter temperatures of -10° and lower. Many of these are running types, but panda bamboo (*Fargesia* spp.) is a genus of clumping bamboos from the Himalayas that can tolerate -25°F. References suggest these should be planted where they will receive 4 to 5 hours of morning sun and some afternoon shade.

Bamboos adapted to temperate regions like the Verde Valley or southern part of Yavapai County grow a complete set of new leaves each spring, the old ones falling away as the new ones develop. This can be viewed as messy, but these leaves are best left in place as mulch. Bamboo is a forest plant and the natural mulch of dead leaves helps keep the soil moist and it recycles nutrients. The leaves can be gathered and composted if a more formal look is desired. In terms of water use, bamboo does require some irrigation to establish, but it can tolerate much less frequent irrigation once established.

Bamboo only flowers every 50 to 100 years or more, so it is usually propagated by division. Plants can be harvested from established bamboo stands using the proper tools, but it can be labor intensive. It is best to transplant bamboo in the warm season. For running bamboos, use a sharpened shovel and a pair of hand pruners, dig and separate a clump that has white roots, a green top, and several joints on the rhizomes. Keep the root ball moist and replant as soon as possible.

Clumping bamboos are probably best for most homeowners because they are not invasive. Running bamboos should be planted in large containers to control their spread. There are several bamboo species, both clumping and running, which could be grown successfully in the temperate regions of Yavapai County..

A bamboo lookalike, the undesirable giant reed (*Arundo donax*), is common around the Verde Valley and has become invasive along the Verde River and its tributaries. Do not transplant or encourage this plant.

*Nandina domestica*, also called heavenly bamboo, is not a bamboo. It is a cold hardy landscape plant that grows successfully in all parts of Yavapai County.

## **Additional Resource:**

### **Bamboo Garden**

Bamboo Sales - 300 varieties - Will Ship - Educational Resources

[www.bamboogarden.com](http://www.bamboogarden.com)

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