

# Landscaping with tropical bamboos

The author is a bamboo specialist from Malaysia now practising in Florida, USA.

By Charles Teh

**T**ropical bamboos characteristically grow in dense clumps due to production of closely-spaced new shoots from the base of the mother plant. As more and more shoots develop, the clump grows larger in diameter. Each shoot consists of a central jointed or segmented stem known as a 'culm', from which arise short lateral leafy branches. The joints (nodes) are solid while the segments between nodes (internodes) are hollow. The branches develop from buds located at the nodes. Due to the dense clumping of the culms the leafy tops tend to curve outwards as the clumps develop. Temperate bamboos, in contrast, produce new shoots that are widely spaced out because they run underground for some distance away from the mother culm before turning up to grow vertically.

In landscaping, clumped bamboos can be easily kept in place whereas running bamboos run out of their allocated places and invade surrounding areas. For this reason, clumping bamboos are beginning to be accepted in Florida in landscaped settings and getting noticed for their unique attributes, which include giving the landscape an exotic tropical ambience. The most widespread landscape use currently is as a hedge or screen, but some of the more colourful types are displayed as focal points for special effects.

An avid gardener can get very imaginative in sculpting bamboo to create beautiful works of art in a landscape.

Some bamboos are also planted for their edible shoots and as a source of sticks or poles. Large-diameter culms can be easily split to make strong, straight, woody sticks for supporting weak-stemmed plants such as tomatoes.



*Bambusa chungii*, the Tropical Blue Bamboo

***Bambusa chungii***, the Tropical Blue Bamboo is valued for its bluish waxy coating on its culms. It is planted either as a specimen or an avenue. A very cold-hardy bamboo to 12°F that deserves to be planted throughout the whole state of Florida. Origin: China



*Bambusa eutuldoides viridivittata*, Asian Lemon Bamboo

*Bambusa eutuldoides viridivittata* the Asian Lemon Bamboo is possibly one of the best screening bamboos as branches develop from the first basal node of each culm. When trimmed up it displays its beautiful yellow culms. Origin: China.



*Bambusa glaucophylla*, the Malay Dwarf Bamboo

*Bambusa glaucophylla*, the Malay Dwarf Bamboo is used for hedging or as a special feature bamboo because of its attractive white leaves. A very versatile bamboo for any garden as it grows up to 12 ft but not cold-hardy. Origin: Malaysia.



*Bambusa lako*, the Timor Black Bamboo

*Bambusa lako*, the Timor Black Bamboo is one of four black-culmed bamboo species currently available in Florida. It is the most versatile and popular species of the four. The young culms emerge green and over the next few months turn gradually chocolate and eventually shiny black. It can grow up to 40 ft but can be topped and kept short to focus attention on the attractive black culms. Some shade is preferred when it is young, to prevent bleaching of the culms especially by the afternoon sun. The species is from Timor Leste.



*Bambusa malingensis*, the Seabreeze Bamboo

***Bambusa malingensis***, the Seabreeze Bamboo is highly recommended for screening because of its very fast growth rate and ability to form a screen or windbreak from ground level up to about 40 ft high. It can be easily trimmed to maintain a fixed height, e.g. at 6 ft. It is also salt-tolerant. Its origin is South China (Hainan).



*Bambusa multiplex* 'Golden Goddess'

***Bambusa multiplex*** is represented mainly by two popular varieties, used to make hedges and also for topiary. The variety 'Golden Goddess' grows to about 10 ft tall and 'Alphonse Karr' to 20 ft. 'Alphonse Karr' also has yellow culms with green stripes, which add colour to



*Bambusa multiplex* 'Alphonse Karr'

an otherwise all-green hedge. Both varieties are easily trimmed with hedge trimmers and when trimmed regularly can quickly develop very dense foliage. Hedge trimmers have made it possible to create and maintain spectacular bamboo hedges. The origin of this species is South China.

***Bambusa textilis gracilis***, the Graceful Bamboo, is very popular among landscape architects. It grows to 30 ft tall, with culms of about 1 inch diameter, and forming tight clumps. The lower part of the culm does not produce branches, so the effect in hedge planting is a two-part hedge with a densely leafy upper part and a leafless 'see-through' basal part. It can also be manicured



*Bambusa textilis gracilis*, the Graceful Bamboo

to lower heights of 6 to 10 feet tall by regular trimming to force the growth of lower branches. Its origin is Southern China.

about 50 ft tall. The short ‘Wamin’ variety has curious bulging internodes and can be grown in any small garden without difficulty. The species is native to Southeast Asia.



*Bambusa vulgaris* 'Wamin'

***Bambusa vulgaris***, the most common bamboo in the tropics, is planted in South Florida. It is an ‘entry-level’ bamboo because it is easily propagated by culm cuttings. The yellow-culmed Golden Hawaiian variety grows to



*Dendrocalamus minor amoenus*, the Angel Mist Bamboo

*Dendrocalamus minor amoenus*, the Angel Mist Bamboo is planted for its attractive striped and thickly waxed bluish culms. Its origin is Southern China.

*Schizostachyum brachycladum* 'Yellow' is grown for its prized golden yellow erect culms. It is one of the most beautiful bamboos in the world but its application is somewhat limited as it cannot tolerate temperatures below 30°F. Origin: South East Asia.

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*Schizostachyum brachycladum* 'Yellow'



An unidentified species from Thailand trimmed to look like lollipops