

Bamboo - *Bambusa sp.*

General information: There are a number of things called bamboo which everyone agrees are bamboo: *Arundinaria sp.*, *Bambusa sp.*, *Phyllostachys sp.*, *Sasa sp.*, and *Sasaella sp.* In addition, there are a number of things that look like bamboo, and are called bamboo, but aren't, like *Pogonatherum crinitum* ("German bamboo") and *Peperomia 'Bamboo Stalks.'* Then there is, of course, *Nandina domestica* (sacred or heavenly bamboo) which isn't a bamboo, or even a grass, but a shrub related to barberry, and doesn't even look much like bamboo.

Temperature: Many bamboos need some frost protection. According to the Samsons, *Bambusa sp.* should never be exposed to temperatures under 66F.

Lighting: Full sun to partial shade.

Watering: Bamboo like lots of water, but not wet feet. They should be watered daily, but kept in fast-draining soil.

Feeding: Use a high-nitrogen food, such as a lawn fertilizer. (It is, after all, a sort of grass!) Feed every two weeks throughout spring and summer.

Pruning and wiring: Bamboo is generally styled as a grove, or used as an accent plant. Cut back yellowing or ratty-looking stalks. Cutting the stalks down in general will help to reduce the size of the plant. New stalks should appear almost immediately, although it is wise to leave a stalk or two uncut for good measure. The Samsons style their *Bambusa* as solitaires, saying that young bamboo can even be wired. Tomlinson says that large, interesting bamboo are occasionally grown alone, but that an individual stalk will only live for 5-6 years. Most shaping is done by thinning.

Propagation: Divide the rhizomes. Bamboo are invasive, and will grow like crazy if you give them the space.

Repotting: Every one to two years, in late spring. Use fast-draining mix, except in very shallow pots, or on slabs, where ordinary bonsai soil is OK. Murata notes that the rhizomes tend to push out of the soil and will need to be trimmed back when the plant is repotted to maintain a neat appearance. The Samsons recommend that the roots be spread evenly across the surface area of the pot.

Pests an diseases: Red spider mite is common. Also, bamboo easily becomes pot bound.

Some species suitable for bonsai:

- *Bambusa multiplex* - A fine stemmed bamboo, with small yellow-green leaves.
- *Bambusa nigra*: Black bamboo - As stalks mature, the turn black. Generally safe to freezing tempertures.
- *Bambusa ventricosa*: Buddha's belly bamboo - Has a bright green

trunk with ringed swellings that develop as the plant matures. Tomlinson pictures a Buddha's belly bamboo he classifies as *Phyllostachys aurea*, an incorrect nomenclature.

Compiled by Sabrina Caine