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NON-INVASIVE CLUMPING BAMBOOS

Clumping bamboos will stay where you put them! They will not run in all directions like the running bamboos. In the Deep South, clumping bamboos make the fastest-growing privacy screens, windbreaks, and noise/dust barriers available. They also make beautiful specimen plants in the garden.

The following recommendations are based on our zone 8b coastal plain climate and sandy soils. Recommendations may vary for colder areas or areas with heavier soils.

COLD-HARDINESS:

Most of the clumping bamboos that perform well in the Deep South are sub-tropical clumping species of the *Bambusa* genus. Cold-hardiness varies by species, with some remaining evergreen to around twelve degrees Fahrenheit. Others are less cold-hardy and will be fully or partially deciduous in areas where winter temperatures dip into the teens.

In addition to the sub-tropical clumpers, there are at least a few clumping bamboos native to mountainous regions that may be grown in the Deep South. These bamboos are generally more cold-hardy than the *Bambusas*, but may suffer from too much heat and humidity in our region. *Fargesia dracocephala* 'Rufa' is an example of a "mountain clumper".

The best clumping bamboo species for evergreen privacy screens in the Deep South are ***Bambusa multiplex*** (Hedge Bamboo) and ***Bambusa textilis*** (Weaver's Bamboo.) Each of these species has several varieties with distinct characteristics for different landscaping applications.

The less-hardy clumpers include ***Bambusa oldhamii***, ***Bambusa malingensis***, and ***Bambusa chungii***, among many others. These bamboos aren't generally recommended for evergreen privacy screens where winter temps dip into the teens, but can make great perennial plants in these areas. Additionally, if planted in a protected microclimate with overhead frost protection, and using the cultural practices listed below, these species may remain evergreen below their stated minimums.

The cold-hardiness of clumping bamboos increases as they mature. For the first year or two they may be fully or partially deciduous in the winter, and then become evergreen once their size and root mass has increased.

Following are a few cultural practices that increase the cold-hardiness of clumping bamboos and are suggested to get them off to a fast start:

- Any time temps are expected to dip below 25F, water the bamboo thoroughly. This helps to insulate the bamboo's roots and will lessen the effects of cold, drying winds on the foliage
- A fall application of wood ashes from a woodstove or fireplace is beneficial to the root system and aids in cold-hardiness. Although we advocate organic

growing methods, some growers also claim that fall fertilization with conventional fertilizer (low nitrogen so as not to encourage top growth late in the season) enhances cold-hardiness.

- **Apply a generous mulch layer around the bamboo to help insulate the roots during the winter. Wood chips, straw, etc. work well.**

SITE SELECTION:

Sub-tropical clumping bamboos (the Bambusas) prefer full sun to part shade. They will not grow in deep shade. The Fargesias and other “mountain clumpers” generally need shade to thrive in the Deep South. Clumping bamboos also love water, but need good drainage, so do not plant them in an area that has standing water or remains soggy for extended periods of time.

PLANTING:

1. Dig a hole slightly larger than the size of the pot.
2. Set the plant in the hole with the top of the root ball at or slightly lower than the soil level around the hole.
3. Backfill the hole with a 50/50 mix of the native soil and a good quality potting soil or mature compost.
4. Water thoroughly to settle the root ball.
5. Mulch around the plant with straw or woodchips to conserve moisture.

WATERING:

Make sure your bamboo has adequate water during the first year while it is getting established. Check it daily for the first month or so, and regularly thereafter. Regular, deep waterings using a soaker hose or drip irrigation are recommended. A good rule of thumb is the equivalent of an inch of rain per week for the first year. More water will be required during hot, dry spells and on drier sites. One sign of inadequate water is leaf curling. Some bamboos will exhibit leaf curling during the heat of the day whether they actually need water or not, but if the leaves are curling early in the morning or after the sun drops in the evening, then your bamboo probably needs water. After the first year, your bamboo should be well-established and will be fairly drought-tolerant. You do not have to give supplemental water to your bamboo once it is established, but it will mature faster and have a healthier appearance if it is watered regularly during dry spells.

Symptoms of overwatering include yellowing/spotting of foliage. This is not usually a problem with in-ground plantings on well-drained sites, but can be an issue with bamboos kept in decorative planters.

FERTILIZATION:

For organic bamboo fertilization, we recommend top-dressing with compost or composted manure in early spring and early fall. If using a commercial fertilizer, we recommend a balanced, slow-release fertilizer in spring and mid-summer, and a low-nitrogen fertilizer in the fall. Palm fertilizers work well for the subtropical clumping bamboos. Bamboo can tolerate poor soils and no fertilization, but a little supplemental nutrition will go a long way in terms of growth and appearance.

PRUNING:

Like most cultivated plants, bamboos will need a certain amount of pruning to look their best. The amount of pruning needed will depend on your goals and personal aesthetic preferences. When removing canes, it is generally recommended to cut them as close to ground level as possible.

For specimen plantings, prune out dead canes as needed. Also, after the third growing season, any undersized or unruly canes may be pruned to achieve the desired look. Thinning out

the smaller canes also allows light and airflow into the center of the clump, improving the bamboo's health and vigor. For best growth, do not prune out more than 1/3 of the canes in any given year. For some species, it may be desirable to prune lower limbs to show off the canes.

For privacy screens or other non-specimen applications, pruning the undersized canes is not as critical and it may actually be desirable to leave more of them for a better screening effect. To maintain the bamboo as a sheared hedge, prune the new shoots to the desired height in late summer and late fall (two prunings is usually enough, but you can do more if desired).

BAMBOO PESTS:

Sucking insects such as aphids, scale, and mealy bugs sometimes infest bamboo. They usually do not harm the plant, but may secrete honeydew, which will cause the growth of black sooty mold, giving the bamboo an unsightly appearance. Available organic controls include insecticidal soaps and neem oil (cool season use only). Unfortunately, we have not found an effective organic control for mealy bugs. They usually require a product containing Imidacloprid or other systemic pesticide to eradicate. This is available in garden centers as Bayer Complete Insect Killer or similar Bayer products (spray or granular).

For most bamboos, these pests are only a minor nuisance and barely noticeable. Although we spray to keep our potted plants free of pests, we don't treat our field specimens because we try to minimize our chemical usage (and leave food for all the beneficial insects!) We believe the best way to minimize the impact of pests on in-ground plantings is to build healthy soil using organic growing methods. Plants that are over-fertilized with chemical fertilizers are more attractive to pest insects and, although they may grow faster, are not necessarily as healthy as organically-grown plants.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR NEW BAMBOO!

**FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US WITH ANY QUESTIONS
NOT ANSWERED HERE!**