

## Choosing and Using Bamboos

By Luis Llenza

Bamboos are the evergreens of the grass family and can be a beautiful component of your landscape design. They provide shade, wind break, acoustical barriers and aesthetic beauty. They are distinctive by the size and pointed shape of their leaves with fine, parallel veins but especially by their stems known as the canes or “culms”. Bamboo culms can be golden yellow, green, honey-colored, striped, black, or even blue.

Bamboos vary in size, shape, color and growing habits and to be sure, they can be invasive. The invasive kind of bamboo is called a “runner”. To be cautious, I suggest using running bamboos only in pots or containers. Our subtropical zone provides us with one kind of bamboo known as “clumpers”. Clumping bamboo grows as a tight clump, expanding slowly and evenly around its circumference with fear of invasion in a small garden.

*Bambusa vulgaris* is the most common bamboo found throughout the tropical world and you can easily recognize one of its species, the Golden Hawaiian (*Bambusa vulgaris* "Vittata"), and handsome yellow culms, irregularly striped with green. The Mexican Weeping Bamboo (*Otatea acuminata*), is another commonly used bamboo. It looks like a plume waving in the breeze and is used successfully in dry, well-drained areas.

But let's get adventuresome as we landscape with bamboo. If you need a screen or fence, need to hide a neighbor's eyesore or even your utility lines look at the *Bambusa textiles gracilis* with its green culms and small-sized leaves, growing 20 – 25 feet. The *Neosinocalamus affinis viridiflavus* is green with alternating yellow striped culm, medium sized leaf, grows up to 35 feet. Imagine natural high fences without the need for permits!

The solitary stand of one bamboo always provides a statement. My favorites are the Sunburst, *Bambusa pervariabilis viridistriata*, the exotic Tropical Blue (*Bambusa (lignania) chungii*) and the Black Bamboo (*Gigantochloa atrovioleacea*). The Sunburst is highly variegated. The Black Bamboo can be used to balance a garden and create depth. The Tropical Blue provides a contemporary accent in landscape design.

Privacy hedges can also be attained using Bamboo. *Bambusa vulgaris* 'Wamin' (often debated as another Buddha belly-type bamboo) looks like the real Buddha's Belly bamboo (*Bambusa ventricosa*). It grows densely and allows for privacy and sound reduction when grown as a hedge. Be sure to visit the Dade County Rare Fruit and Spice Park in South Dade to see these bamboo examples.

- Frieda Hemple – Deep red with green margins; good in hanging basket in shade.
- Carolyn Whorton – Pink with red veins, green margins, slightly sun tolerant.

#### Strap-leaf or Lance-leaf Caladiums

Strap-leaf Caladiums and Lance-leaf Caladiums produce pointed, elongated, arrow-shaped leaves on plants that reach 12-to-14 inches high, with a dense growing pattern that makes them a good choice for patio pots and hanging baskets.

- Red Frill – Red leaf specimen ideal for hanging basket in shade and sun.
- Pink Gem – Pink to white color, excellent for hanging basket; shade/partial sun.
- White Wing – White with curled edges mottled with green.
- Pink Symphony – Pink with green veins.

#### Dwarf Caladiums

Dwarf Caladiums can also grow 15-to-17 inches tall but their leaves are smaller than the heart-shaped, fancy-leaf varieties they resemble.

- Candidum Jr. – White patterned with green veins.
- Miss Muffett – Chartreuse speckled with maroon; use in hanging basket.
- Gingerland – White with red blotches and green margins along leaf edge.