



Bamboo

Running & Clumping

There are several varieties of Running Bamboo, which will grow along the Central Coast, and understanding their growth cycle and where they like to be grown is very important in successful Running Bamboo gardening.

Running Bamboo

Running bamboo has a different growth cycle than most plants, as they send up new canes once a year, usually beginning in mid-April. The new canes grow up and out of the ground (away from the center of the Running Bamboo planting) and never get any wider. These new canes continue to grow upward for approximately 2 months, and then will stop, and never grow again.

After the new canes stop growing, the Bamboo then sends out new rhizomes underground. These rhizomes can spread underground as much as 8 to 10 feet during the summer months. The following spring, new canes emerge from the new rhizomes, and the growth cycle begins all over again.

Running Bamboo canes are evergreen, and are very good about keeping their leaves even through harsh winters. If by chance they would defoliate after the winter, they will re-leaf in late spring. Each cane will stay green and live for several years, before turning a tan color and eventually dieing out. But remember, as old canes die, new ones are being produced.

Because of their ability to spread underground, Bamboo can easily become a very invasive plant for the landscape. And, many varieties can reach heights of 20 feet or more, and develop canes 1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter. So Bamboo control can become quite an issue. Control is best obtained by placing an in-ground Bamboo root barrier (made of rigid plastic) around the area where you want your Bamboo to stay. Be sure to leave a 2-3 inch lip above the ground to prevent the rhizomes from escaping. Mowing around the plant can also discourage new growth. Bamboo will not tolerate the low mowing heights.

Running Bamboo does require a dormant period, which will be brought on by the colder winter temperatures. For this reason, as well as the lack of humidity and low light received, they typically do not do very well indoors as a houseplant.

Planting and Spacing

The main requirement in planting is to make sure that there are no air pockets around the rootball (this means that when back-filling, the soil should be well tamped and gently compacted around the plant). We like to plant the bamboo an inch or two below the existing grade, or to make a small moat or dish around the plant to facilitate the initial feeding and watering.

If you have clayey or highly compacted soil, your goal will be to loosen and aerate the soil. On a small scale, and for an initial fix, this means a shovel &/or a spading fork. On a large scale this means both digging holes with a backhoe (and amending the mix within) or ripping with a tractor. For long term solutions to clayey and highly compacted soils, good organic compost and mulch (applied once or twice a year) are very good allies.

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Bamboos can be spaced according to your goals. Plant closer together for a wall or windbreak, farther apart for a screen; or create an open grid if you are managing your plants in order to harvest lumber or edible shoots. Your spacing will vary by species.

The closest spacing we ever recommend is to place the holes 4 feet "on center" (that means that the centers of the holes are 4 feet apart from each other); for a species like Malay Dwarf (*B. glaucophylla*) this would result in a dense wall of bamboo. For species like *Dendrocalamus membranaceus*, you could get a wall of bamboo by placing them 12-15 ft. apart "on center" (assuming sufficient water). If you are planting with the intent of harvesting for lumber or shoots, grids of 15-25 ft. are in common use (depending on the species in use) to allow sufficient room to work.

Watering

About 98% of how well these plants will look is determined by their ability to get *properly* watered. If you live where it does not rain *a lot* please consider irrigating your plants.

Though many of these plants will live in less than 40" of rainfall a year, they will not look like you probably want them to look. The only really effective irrigation that we have come across is drip irrigation. Sprinklers are designed to water the ground to a depth of about 2" (think lawn and shrub). Don't go there. It does not work for bamboos. If you run sprinklers long enough to water the bamboos, you will waste a lot of water and probably drown whatever else is planted nearby. To irrigate these bamboos properly it is necessary to wet the entire root-ball/rhizome which can be as much as 3 feet in depth, and will have a diameter slightly larger than the footprint of the bamboo at ground level. The "feeder roots" will extend from the rhizome another foot or two.

Clumping Bamboo

Growing clumping bamboo is relatively easy. Here are a handful of tips guaranteed to reward you with an altogether satisfying and long-lasting relationship:

- 1: Give your plant morning sun and afternoon shade. Otherwise, it will scald, curl and burn.
- 2: While an established clumping bamboo is drought-tolerant, it will be far happier with deep, weekly waterings, particularly when summer rainfall is scarce.
- 3: Use a high-nitrogen fertilizer (after all, it's a grass) through spring and early summer, but don't fertilize past the 4th of July.
- 4: New whiplike canes (called culms) will shoot up once a year and appear to have no foliage. Just leave them be and they will leaf out. Since this is an evergreen, though, expect some leaf shedding in spring.
- 5: No reason to ever prune your clumping bamboo, beyond cutting out obviously dead culms by chopping them back at ground level.
- 6: Each year's new growth will be higher than the previous year's, until the plant reaches its ultimate height (typically, 8'-10'). It will slowly thicken in diameter but miracle of miracles, it will remain a tight clump.

If you have any questions concerning bamboo, please contact one of our many experts at McShane's and they would be more than happy to help you.