

PLANTING A BARRIER WITH CLUMPING BAMBOO (April 07, needs editing)

Your request is a common one. Many people use clumping bamboo to create an effective visual barrier. You have to make several decisions. To help you with these decisions I would like to recommend you purchase a recent copy of the American Bamboo Society's Species/Source List. This 50-page publication gives nominal sizes, height and culm diameters for about 450 species of bamboo. It also gives minimum temperatures where leaf damage is likely to occur. While this publication is not essential, it will help you in making a particular species selection. The current year publication is available for \$3.00 per copy plus \$1.00 mailing costs for each copy. A limited number of last years edition is \$1.00 less. You make purchase a copy by sending a check for the proper amount, payable to LGCC to Gerald Morris, 148 Rue Acadian, Slidell, LA 70461.

First, as most of the clumping bamboos are tropical or semi-tropical plants you need to make a decision based on where you live and the expected minimum temperature. If you live in the southern part of Louisiana, Mississippi or in USDA zone 9 you have more choices. If you live in the central parts of these states you have a more limited selection. The plants are not totally zone dependent. For example, you might gamble a bit on a particular species that might appear to be too tender, but if you can get it planted and with a few moderately warm winters then after some maturity it can survive a colder winter with thick mulching and care. Even a cold winter might do considerable leaf damage, but the plant may survive and re-leaf in the spring. This may not be an easy decision and will depend on how long a barrier and the expense. If it is 100 feet long and you will need many individual plants, then you may be more reluctant to gamble then if you were only interested in a smaller number of plants.

Second, what is the maximum height you want for your barrier, without topping or trimming? Do you want a barrier 6 feet high or one that might reach a height of 25 feet or even 50 feet? This will depend largely on the species selected, but you can reduce the height by pruning. The Species/Source List will help you in this decision.

Third, do you want an all green plant or one with some yellow-green mix or coloration? Again the Species List will help in this choice.

Fourth, after you make your selection as to the particular species to give you the proper height, color, etc., do you want to achieve a quick, one or two-year barrier or can you wait a few years for growth?

Yes, you have many options, particularly if you live in the southern part of our state near the coast.

One of the most cold-hardy and more common species to the area is the *Bambusa multiplex* or the "hedge bamboo". It will survive down to about 12F, reaches about 25 feet maximum height, has low branches and forms a dense barrier. There are several sub-species or cultivators of *B. multiplex* that range in height from a few feet to the 25 ft height, and there are some color variations. The common green hedge is grown successfully in Jackson, MS. The culms get 1.5 inches in diameter and is a hardy, reliable plant. There is a yellow and green stripe cultivar call

B. multiplex 'Alphonse Karr'. It is slightly more upright than common green and has the same cold hardiness. Slightly smaller varieties are *B. multiplex* 'Fernleaf' and 'Golden Goddess'

If you are looking for a few specimen plants, live in the southern part of the area, want big bamboo, you might consider *Bambusa oldhamii*. It is a very upright clumper reaching about 4 inches in diameter and 50 feet tall. It is listed as a minimum temperature of 21 degrees F where you can get severe leaf-burn. But with heavy mulching and some north-wind protection it might survive. This species could be a bit risky in the Picayune area and further north. This might not be cold-hardy enough for you. There is also *Bambusa textilis*, hardy to 18F, that reaches 40 ft high and about 2 inches in diameter that might also serve your needs. Again this one might be a bit risky north of Picayune. If you are in a warm micro-climate area, protected by woods, or something that might give some wind and cold protection, you might try it, but there is a small risk. Very likely it might suffer considerable damage with a heavy frost down in the mid-high teens. These come every few years. Chances are the plant would not be killed and even if frozen to the ground, it would survive and new shoots will emerge when the weather warms. The very risky part would be if this happened in the first couple of years it could kill the plant completely. If the plant matured and was several years old it would have a better chance of survival.

Generally speaking, it is advisable to consider planting two or more species or varieties. For example, alternating a common green hedge with an 'Alphonse Karr' can produce an interesting barrier with color variety. Bamboo does flower and produce seeds, and frequently dies after doing so. Flowering periodicities vary for different species so if you have a single species as your entire barrier the entire barrier may die during a flowering period. If you have two species and alternate them in the barrier you will hopefully end with a thinned, but surviving barrier. Many bamboos flower once every 20-40 years so this may not be too serious a threat, but two species planted also offers interest.

If you wish to learn more about the 150-200 species available in the area, you might be interested in joining the Louisiana-Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Bamboo Society. There is much to learn.

As far as planting a long barrier of clumpers, I would suggest spacing plants about 5-6 feet apart where you want to create the dense barrier. If there is a fence involved, do not set the plants too close to the fence as they will spread a bit. In just a few years they can get several feet across at the base. They spread more at height, probably 10-12 feet or so. You can either buy enough plants to get this spacing from the start or you can buy some minimum number and divide these after a good year of growth. After a year with good care, regular watering and fertilizer, you should be about to divide each of the original plants into 3-4 others. So if you did the original planting at a 15 ft spacing, if you got three divisions from each you could get your 5-foot separation. This is simply a process of exchanging time and work at making the divisions for the initial expense of purchasing a large quantity of individual plants.

Good luck,

Gerald Morris

