



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article August 27, 2018

Beware of Bamboo?

By Lydia Holley

My daughter recently asked me a plant question. Her neighbor planted bamboo along their shared fence line, and she wondered if she should be concerned about it invading her yard. The easy answer is, "It depends." The more informative answer is a little longer.



There are two types of bamboo, running and clumping. Running bamboo spreads by long underground rhizomes. These rhizomes grow under the soil horizontally, and new stems, or culms, grow along the rhizomes. These fast-growing rhizomes can spread out to 30 feet per year. In addition to their extreme growth rate, some bamboos emit an allelopathic compound, which acts as a natural herbicide to other plants. It is this unique combination that allows bamboo to form dense colonies.

The running bamboo *Phyllostachys aurea*, or golden bamboo, is one of the fastest-spreading bamboos introduced into the United States. Neil Sperry is frequently asked about golden bamboo. Once introduced into your garden, it is nearly impossible to eradicate. Sperry states that the Dallas Arboretum had to bring in front-end loaders in order to remove the golden bamboo planted there.

Most running bamboos are from Asian countries, although there are three running bamboos native to the United States: giant cane, *Arundinaria gigantea*; switch cane, *Arundinaria tect*; and hill cane, *Arundinaria appalachiana*. Hill cane was not given a scientific name until 2007, when one scientist noticed its unique characteristics. Young stems of native bamboo are shaped like a D, with a flat side. This feature distinguishes them from non-native bamboos. It is exciting to think new plant species are still being discovered right here in the United States.

Most clumping bamboos are from countries with a tropical climate, so they are usually only grown in the south. Clumping bamboos form short rhizomes, so they spread at a slower rate than running bamboos. They are also easier to control, by cutting off new culms as they emerge. If my daughter's neighbor has planted a clumping bamboo, my daughter should be able to control it simply as a result of mowing her lawn.

If her neighbor planted a running bamboo, a two-pronged attack will need to be developed: by tearing or cutting off the newly emerging culms in the spring, and by cutting the rhizomes with a spade or saw, separating them from the mother plant. If the neighbor planted golden bamboo, she might want to consider moving.

Bamboos are lovely to see swaying in the breeze, and make a soothing rustling sound as the wind winds its way around its numerous stems. They come in dramatic colors, and reach varying heights. However, if you decide to add bamboo to your garden, be neighborly. Do not plant golden bamboo, let your neighbors know what type of bamboo you do plant, and let them know how they can control it from spreading into their yard.

Come hear Neil Sperry's advice and stories at Henderson County Master Gardener Association's Fall Conference, "Facts and Fantasies of Texas Gardening, An Evening with Neil Sperry" on Thursday, October 4, Athens County Club, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Tickets are available at:
<https://hendersonmg.ejoinme.org/fallconference>.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com, or visit txmg.org/hendersonmg.