



How Bamboo Grows

It all starts below ground

Like all plants, bamboo starts out as a seed. The seed sprouts, grows roots, and develops into a rootstalk. This process can be very difficult and often has a very low success rate. To combat this problem we cultivate our bamboo at the nursery to speed up the growing process and to insure a successful planting. Once the rootstalk is formed it is called the rhizome. As the rhizome grows, it produces more roots and eventually it forms a bud. This bud can either develop into a shoot or another rhizome.

Roots

Bamboo is a grass so it has a very shallow root system. The rhizomes of bamboo grow in the top 6 inches of the soil. The rest of the roots only grow in the top 20 inches of soil for Moso and within the 8 to 12 inches of soil for Asper. Since its roots are so shallow, bamboo does a great job holding the top layer of soil together. As a result, bamboo prevents soil erosion and creates a better environment for additional bamboo plants to grow.

Rhizomes

To completely understand how bamboo grows we must understand the components of the Rhizomes. It is segmented with nodes and roots, shoots, and other rhizomes grow out of these nodes.

Rhizomes are important because their growth pattern determines how the overall colony grows and spreads. Depending on the type of bamboo, rhizomes can grow in one of two ways: vertically or horizontally.

If the rhizome grows vertically, it is clumping bamboo. The rhizomes of clumping bamboo grow upward and directly off each other, causing the bamboo shoots to “clump” together. Consequently, a colony of clumping bamboo is limited to the area directly surrounding it.

If the rhizome grows horizontally, it is running bamboo. This type of rhizome is straight and “runs” away from the bamboo plant. Since the rhizome grows directly outward. When a bud turns into a new rhizome, it follows this same pattern and helps the colony spread.



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Above Ground

Shoots

Instead of becoming another rhizome, a bud can develop into a shoot. A bamboo shoot is segmented with nodes just like a rhizome. It grows upwards and eventually breaks through the surface of the soil. As it continues to grow, it produces leaves from its nodes to convert sunlight into energy for the rest of the plant. The bamboo shoot continues to grow taller and taller until it reaches its adult height.

As a bamboo colony develops, the new culm (canes) become larger in diameter and the height increases in each new cane until the grove reaches maturity. The oldest culms are usually the smallest in size. The new culms, produced during the Spring of each successive year, will emerge larger than the previous year's growth, as a general rule. This is due to the increase in the underground system of rhizome or roots.

The time from when a new shoot emerges and when it reaches its full height is where bamboo grows at a record-breaking speed. In general, it takes a bamboo shoot 60 days to reach its adult height. After that, the shoot never grows in diameter or height again.

The species of bamboo will determine exactly when the bamboo will shoot.

Moso bamboo will shoot in the late winter and continue to the early spring. Often winter shoots can be harvested and will be quickly replaced by spring shoots without having a detrimental effect to the overall plantation.

Asper bamboo will shoot in late spring and often throughout the summer.

Culms

A fully grown shoot is called a culm or trunk. Culms are the hard, segmented rods that you usually think of when you think of bamboo. While culms never grow any taller, they do replenish their leaves every sprouting season as new bamboo shoots grow around them.

Bamboo doesn't grow after the initial shooting period which means if a culm is damaged or cut it unfurls new leaves. These leaves provide extra energy to the root system and encourage the growth of new shoots. Since bamboo shoots grow so quickly, they easily compensate for the shorter shoot until it reaches the end of its lifespan. This strategy allows bamboo to quickly replenish itself, making it a fantastic renewable resource.

Generally, the lifespan of an individual culm is 10 years. Once the culm reaches the end of its lifespan, it withers and dyes. Its remnants provide extra nutrients to the younger shoots in the bamboo colony and the cycle starts all over again.



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