Bamboo has long been woven into the cultures of many countries, where it has historically been used for everything from food and fodder to musical instruments and construction material. For centuries, millions of people have depended on this plant, which is known as “friend of the people” in China, and “wood of the poor” in India. But the demand for bamboo has been increasing in other parts of the world as well, especially as it relates to furniture, accent pieces, and flooring. More and more, people are seeing the value and beauty of using bamboo in their homes to achieve modern-day fashion with an ethnic flavor. Entire books have been written on the subject, including *Big Bad Bamboo* and *Bamboo, Family Style*.

There are many different sizes and varieties of bamboo. It is both tropical and subtropical, growing in climates as diverse as jungles and mountainsides. Actually giant, woody grasses, it is very adaptable, with some species deciduous and others evergreen. Although there isn't yet a complete knowledge about this plant, there are believed to be between 1100 and 1500 different species of bamboo. The color range is from light green leaves and culms (stems) to dark, rich shades of green or some combination thereof.

Because they are so easy to grow in such a variety of climates, there is a plant available for just about anyone who wishes to grow one in the backyard. Some dwarf species include chimonobambusa marmorea, indocalamus tessellatus, and pleioblastus chino. Also suitable for the personal garden are those categorized as mid size. Examples of these types of plants are bambusa glaucophylla and otatea acuminata aztectorum. Plant starts and seeds are easier to find than ever, being available at nurseries and through mail order.

Choosing bamboo as part of home or garden design makes sense on many levels. Not only does it have an appealing look, but it supports the environment as well as the countries that produce it.

## **Moving to a New Home**

Bamboo plants grow best in a moderately acidic loamy soil. Bamboo is natively a forest plant, and grows best when mulch is kept over the roots and rhizomes. Grass makes a good mulch, because it's high in nitrogen and silica, as do chipped trees, bark, and straw. Bamboo can be planted any time of the year in areas with mild climates. A newly planted bamboo requires frequent and liberal watering, twice a week or more often during hot or windy weather.

To control spread of any of the running bamboo varieties, dig a trench that is at least 30 inches wide and 30 inches deep around the area that you want the newly planted bamboo to occupy. Line the trench with a polyethylene bamboo barrier, and fill the lined trench with gravel. Tightly compact the soil next to the barrier to discourage deep rhizome growth.

## **Staying Healthy**

Do not rake or sweep the bamboo leaves from under the plant, as they provide an effective mulch to keep the soil soft and moist.

If you dig a trench to control running bamboo varieties, examine the trench each fall to determine whether any rhizomes have tried to cross it. If so, cut them off.

Stake tall and slender bamboos.

In the spring, excessive yellowing of the leaves and leaf drop are normal for the growth cycle.

## **Keeping Bugs at Bay**

### Mites

Bamboo mites, not to be confused with spider mites, cause stippling with yellowish centers throughout the leaf of the plant. With magnification, you can see the webbing and the mites themselves on the underside of the leaves, which is where they prefer to suck the juice from. The main problem with mites is visual. For minor infestations, it's possible to control by spraying with insecticidal soap or an approved miticide.

### Mealy Bugs

These can be an occasional problem on clumping varieties of bamboo, and can be controlled by injecting dimethoate directly in the culm. If you prefer not to use this method, you can try submersing the entire plant (assuming it is potted) in water for 12-24 hours; long enough to kill the bugs but not long enough to harm the plant. Because bamboo is native to floodplains, the plants are able to tolerate immersion fairly well.