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## bamboo

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**bamboo**, any of the tall, treelike grasses comprising the subfamily Bambusoideae of the family Poaceae. More than 75 genera and 1,000 species of bamboos have been proposed in botanical literature, but many names are synonymous and thus not considered legitimate.

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Bamboos are giant, fast-growing grasses that have woody stems. They are distributed in tropical and subtropical to mild temperate regions, with the heaviest concentration and largest number of species in East and Southeast Asia and on islands of the Indian and Pacific oceans. A few species of bamboo belonging to the genus *Arundinaria* are native to the southern United States, where they form dense canebrakes along riverbanks and in marshy areas.

The woody, hollow aerial stems (culms (/EBchecked/topic/146086/culm)) of bamboo grow in branching clusters from a thick underground stem (rhizome). The culms often form a dense undergrowth that excludes other plants. Bamboo culms can attain heights ranging from 10 to 15 cm (about 4 to 6 inches) in the smallest species to more than 40 m (about 130 feet) in the largest. Mature bamboos sprout horizontal branches that bear sword-shaped leaves on stalked blades; the leaves on young culms arise directly from the stem. Though the culms of some species grow quickly (as much as 1 foot [0.3 m] per day), most bamboos flower and produce seeds only after 12–120 years' growth, and then only once in their lifetime.

Bamboos are used for a great variety of purposes, especially in East and Southeast Asia. The seeds are eaten as grain, and the cooked young shoots of some bamboos are eaten as vegetables, especially in Chinese cuisines. The raw leaves are a useful fodder for livestock. The pulped fibres of several bamboo species, especially *Dendrocalamus strictus* (/EBchecked/topic/157596/Dendrocalamus-strictus) and *Bambusa arundinacea*, are used to make fine-quality paper. The jointed stems of bamboo have perhaps the most numerous uses; the largest stems supply planks for houses and rafts, while both large and small stems are lashed together to form the scaffoldings used on building-construction sites. The stems are also split up to make buckets and pipes or are used to make furniture, walking sticks, fishing poles, garden stakes, and other utensils. Some species of bamboo are used as ornamentals in landscape gardens. The fine-grained silica produced in the joints of bamboo stems has been used as a medicine in the Orient for centuries under the name *tabasheer*. East Asian artists, poets, and epicures have long celebrated the beauty and utility of bamboo in paintings and verse.

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