

Bamboo in Planters & Containers

Do's, Don'ts and Special Maintenance Considerations

In many situations it may be desirable to grow bamboos in large planters or containers for either commercial or residential installations. These are some tips for the installation and maintenance of bamboos in containers:

- ♦ Good drainage is extremely important in containers. Bamboo rots if sitting in water or soggy soils for long. Containers must have drain holes and should not sit down in saucers where water collects. Also, in commercial installations with built-in planters, pay special attention to designing excellent drainage ñ it will pay off in a big way in the long run!
- ♦ Regular monitoring of the water needs of bamboos installed in containers is of critical importance, likewise. Unlike ground plantings, there is less grace period once containers dry out. Small containers, especially, dry out quickly and need extra awareness about watering them. For the ultimate success of a commercial installation, it is best to arrange for a consistent maintenance crew and educate them about these issues.
- ♦ Runners work better than clumpers for containers, and the larger the container the better. Bamboo likes space, so whatever space you can give it, do! The ultimate size of the plant will often be stunted in a containerized situation. Sometimes this is a desirable effect. Clumpers, however, are particularly stunted in small containers, especially long, narrow ones. When the roots of a clumper reach the walls of a container, they cannot grow any more and the plant will become stunted. Also, the root structure of clumpers is so dense and strong that it can actually burst a clay or ceramic pot once it has filled in. Runners are better suited to containerized situations, because their roots can turn and continue to grow in another direction, expanding the total root mass to support more upper growth.
- ♦ Cement pots or planters are not ideal. The lime in cement leaches out and is bad for the bamboo. If you must plant in cement, however, you may line the planters with plastic root barrier to protect the bamboo. Redwood pots or beds may also be lined with root barrier, if desired, in order to somewhat protect the wood from constant moisture and increase their longevity.
- ♦ Containers of runners which need to be placed on soil may be set 2-4" above ground. This way, if any wayward rhizomes push out of the pot and attempt to root down into the ground, they are easy to see and snip off with clippers. Of course, placement on a strip of root barrier, cement, or decking avoids this issue altogether.
- ♦ Plants in containers eventually become root-bound. When the plant becomes root bound, sometimes the water runs over and down the outside of the root ball without truly penetrating the root ball. At that point, the plant is very vulnerable to suddenly drying out and dying. A root-bound pot can be submerged in a few inches of water in another container for 15-30 minutes to re-hydrate it. But it's best to either divide the plant or re-pot it in a larger container before it reaches this state.
- ♦ Pruning/thinning is a good way to help a plant remain longer in a given size of container. Once the pot is fairly full of culms, you can begin removing some of the new shoots and older canes aggressively. At some point you will still have to divide the plant, but thinning will postpone the need for quite a while. You can also prune lower branches to show off the canes more, or take out thin, misshapen or tilting culms for aesthetic reasons.
- ♦ The recommended fertilizer for containers is a balanced slow-release fertilizer, such as 14-14-14 or 16-16-16.

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