



Built with bamboo

Mark Rayner finds many garden uses for bamboo poles.

BAMBOO poles are a great gardener's aid. They are light, convenient, a natural plant product and can be bought in several lengths up to 1.8m long. For staking taller garden plants, they're robust enough to last for several seasons, relatively inexpensive and blend in well with surrounding planting. Bamboo is such an attractive and versatile garden material it's worth using it in other ways too.

Hot tips for bamboo

- When fixing bamboo together with small panel pins, always drill small pilot holes first to prevent the canes from splitting.
- Bamboo canes can be camouflaged by dense plant growth, so to prevent any eye accidents when weeding, fix an old tennis ball or ping-pong ball to the top of each cane – you might even like to decorate these with a testpot of exterior house paint.
- Make a Japanese-style bamboo trellis for screen and fencing, binding the poles together with twine or strips of flax.
- Weave bamboo and old venetian blind slats for inexpensive garden screens and low windbreaks.

Instant art

A bamboo obelisk makes a great support for large perennials or small climbers and an attractive vertical garden element even if not supporting a plant. This folding one came from Mitre 10 Mega but you could easily make your own rigid version from sawn canes fixed with garden twine or small panel pins and exterior glue. Place within low bushy planting to hide the base and fix each leg to a small garden stake driven into the ground to stop the wind blowing it over.

Gaining height

A teepee of bamboo canes is a great space-saving way to grow climbers and has long been popular in the veggie garden as an effective support for runner beans. It's also a great way of supporting a favourite climber that's growing in a pot, adding instant height to a corner of the garden. Growing a plant in this way allows you to move it out of sight when it looks less than its best and take it with you when you shift house.



Take a seat

Spruce up cane furniture with a lick of paint or exterior wood stain. Brand new furniture can be painted or stained straight away – Resene Woodsman is ideal for staining bamboo and comes in a good colour range. If the furniture has been outdoors for any length of time, treat with Resene Moss and Mould killer (following manufacturer's instructions), and scrub with a soft brush to remove surface debris. Allow to dry thoroughly in the sun before painting or staining. If painting instead of staining, undercoat first with Resene Quick Dry and finish off with Resene Lumbersider.

Scaring the birds

Cut small lengths of bamboo cane and knot them together at 100mm intervals with garden ties or twine to create an effective bird scarer. Hang the knotted tie or suspend horizontally between two bamboo canes over fruiting plants or newly sown seed. Similarly, differing lengths of thick bamboo can be tied to a circle of treated plywood to create a wind chime.





Screen appeal

Bamboo is perfect for a Japanese style garden and can be fixed together to create an attractive screen backing for planting or a sculptural focal point. Fix to a batten frame with small panel pins, thin galvanised wire or, for a more rustic look, bind together with garden twine. Other styles of screen can be created by fixing canes vertically within a timber frame or 'weaving' them together at intervals to form a simple trellis.

Fence appeal

For a stylish fence, fix lengths of thick bamboo cane between two fenceposts and weave in bands of flat Zinalume or aluminium. The metal sheets can be left natural or painted in a colour to tie in with other garden features – use a preparatory metal primer such as Resene Galvo One and finish off with two top coats of Resene Lumbersider tinted to a suitable colour.

Grow your own

- If growing your own bamboo for garden canes, choose a type that doesn't produce runners away from the main clump or, to keep it under control, grow it in a very large container. For larger species, an old farm trough may prove ideal.
- For good cane production, bamboo planted in containers need feeding and regular watering.
- Dainty Fairy bamboo (*Bambusa gracilis*) can be planted in the garden and, in time, used for small, fine canes. It is drought and frost hardy.
- In colder areas, make sure you choose frost-hardy bamboos. Examples include Oldhami bamboo (*Dendrocalamopsis oldhamii*), (good for large, stout canes), shade and moisture-loving Himalayan weeping bamboo (*Drepanostachyum falcatum*), and the very handsome Alphonse Karr bamboo (*Bambusa multiplex* var. Alphonse Karr). – Susie Longdell.

Floral support

If you're planning an outdoor event, use a sturdy bamboo cane as an effective stand for a topiary-style floral arrangement. Fix the cane directly into the ground (you can hide the base with surrounding planting) or cement it into a pot. Fix a block of florists Oasis to the top of the cane and create a rounded 'head' with flowers and foliage.

