



Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 141

Living Bamboo Sound Barrier

A living sound barrier can soften the sounds of traffic and neighbourhood noise, create a visually pleasing privacy barrier and block winds. If you have an outdoor space but find noise to be a problem, you can plant a bamboo screen and create a comfortable place to garden, entertain or just relax.

Advantages

Bamboo is a fast-growing plant, so using a clumping variety is important. The spreading type is very invasive, while the clumping varieties spread only a few inches each year with a U-shaped rhizome (underground stem), rather than the long horizontal rhizomes of the spreading type, which have given bamboo a bad reputation.

If you live in extremely noisy conditions, bamboo used in combination with other plants, a berm or a fountain will absorb and mask unwanted sounds. For the best noise reduction, the planting should be placed as close to the source of noise as possible.

Types

Bamboo is a great plant choice for building a sound barrier because it has a vertical, dense habit with beautiful, thick foliage. Several cold-hardy, clumping varieties of bamboo are available. These plants do well in the summer and can tolerate temperatures as low as -31° C. They will grow 1 to 2 feet every year and reach 8 to 14 feet high.

- *Fargesia murielae*—good in part shade, cascading foliage

- *Fargesia nitida*—blue culms
- *Fargesia nitida* ‘Nymphenburg’—narrow leaves, weeping habit, great near water
- *Fargesia* sp. ‘Jiuzhaigou’ I—red culms
- *Fargesia* sp. ‘Rufa’—red culms, fast growth

Maintenance

The clumping varieties listed above do best in a spot with afternoon shade. Before planting, add lots of organic material to the soil. Keep the soil moist, especially with a new planting.

Bamboo can be fertilized with a slow-release lawn formula in the spring. Water the soil and foliage during the hot parts of the day to prevent drying out. This is especially important with new plants.

When the bamboo stock (culm) has reached the desired height, you can cut it. It will stop growing at that height and thicken. To thin out or beautify your bamboo noise barrier, prune unwanted or yellowing branches. Bamboo culms can live up to fifteen years; as the plant matures, pull dried-out culms yearly.

For a tropical look that serves a practical purpose, choose bamboo for your sound barrier. You will enjoy it (and your quieter garden) for years to come.

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