

Plant of the Week

Giant Bamboo

Giant Grass

Bambusa balcooa

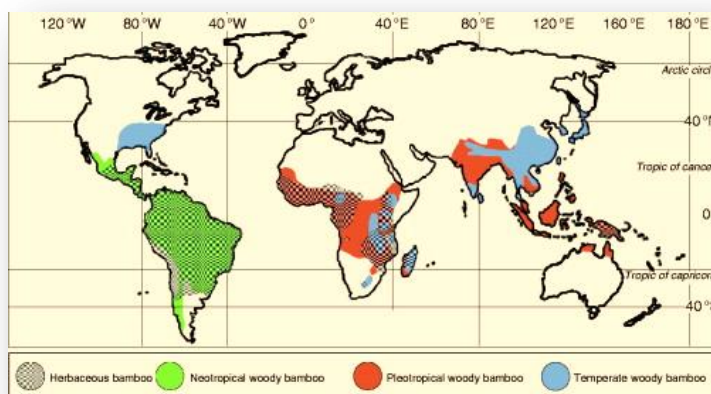


When we talk about “grass”, lawn grass, cereal crops, pasture and perhaps savannah grasslands are probably the images most likely to come to mind. However, there is great diversity amongst the thousands of species and genera of grasses (plant family **Poaceae**) throughout the world. Bamboos, too, are grasses, and belong to the sub-family **Bambusoideae** which includes ~70 genera and more than 1,400 species¹. The greatest diversity of bamboo is in south-east Asia (China 626 spp., India 102 spp., Japan 84 spp., Myanmar 75 spp., Malaysia 50 spp.) and South America (Brazil 134 spp., Venezuela 68 spp. & Columbia 56 spp.). There are no native species of bamboo in Europe¹ and of course, it would never survive in Antarctica. The stems of bamboos between nodes are characteristically hollow.

Bamboos are of major economic importance and cultural significance in Asia where they are used for building, food, textiles, paper pulp and innumerable household items. Bamboo 竹 features in artworks and is of prime importance in Chinese gardens where, together with plum blossom 梅, orchid 兰 and chrysanthemum 菊, it is known as one of the **Four Gentlemen** 梅兰竹菊 which are considered to represent the four seasons. And, of course, bamboo is the food of the Giant Panda.

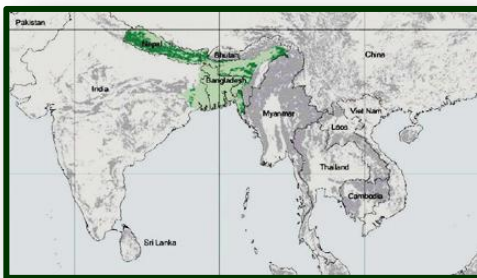


Bamboo 竹子, Xu Wei 徐渭, Ming Dynasty 明代



World distribution of bamboo, Malay, D, Bhattacharya, S, Singh, P, Filgueiras, T S, Pal, A. 2008.

Bambusa balcooa, sometimes referred to as the **Female Bamboo**, is a native of north-eastern India, Nepal and Bangladesh and is considered to be an excellent species for scaffolding, paper pulp and wood chips². It is a popular building material for houses and bridges and on a lesser scale, used for baskets, mats, roofing. Young shoots are eaten and leaves are used as fodder. The use of bamboo for scaffolding should be tempered with some reservations. Although it is extremely strong with high tensile strength, AND cheap, it has also been responsible for many deaths and serious injuries. Look for *Bambusa balcooa* along the roadway between E8B and Macquarie University Hospital.



World distribution of *Bambusa balcooa*

(<http://www.guadubamboo.com/bambusa-balcooa.html#ixzz28Oocjo8v>)

¹ Malay, D, Bhattacharya, S, Singh, P, Filgueiras, T S, Pal, A. 2008. *Bamboo Taxonomy & Diversity in the Era of Molecular Markers*. Advances in Botanical Research 47: 225 – 268.

² Guadua Bamboo Costa Rica: <http://www.guadubamboo.com/bambusa-balcooa.html#ixzz28Oocjo8v>
Photograph of Giant Panda: Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Panda_National_Zoo.jpg

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