

A Place for Bamboo

By Bamboo Artisan Matthew English

Bamboo is an ancient grass that has influenced the art and technology of every culture where it was found. Prized by artisans and crafters, the aesthetics of this group of plants carries through from the grove to the products it is transformed into. Sometimes revered by the humans interacting with this group of grasses, bamboo has been skillfully crafted into a wide variety of artistic and utilitarian products—one artisan documented 1000 uses. From the Americas to Asia and Africa (Europe lost its bamboo during the last ice age) people have made their homes and multitudes of useful products out of bamboo. Common uses are baskets for all imaginable uses, mats, furniture and tools like rakes and brooms.

The beauty of bamboo can be traced back to its relationship with the earth. Its rhizomes (the underground stem) knit and hold the soil together, preventing erosion and actually building topsoil over time from leaf mulch and silt deposits. Bamboo's dense foliage shades and protects the soil from drought and torrential rain. Esthetically, the diversity of height, leaf size, color and wide range of growth make bamboo highly valuable for striking landscapes. Its ability to produce large amounts of resources quickly and in small areas makes it a wonderful natural resource in a time when we are quickly consuming most of the natural resources around us. Beauty and usefulness come together in this plant. From natural beauty, to soil conservation, to human food and animal fodder and raw materials for craft, art construction and industry, this plant has it all.

Matthew English is a bamboo artisan and teacher. Matthew has been working with bamboo for over 12 years, studying and collecting information on growing and utilizing temperate bamboo. Matthew has studied and worked with craftsmen from China, Japan, India, Africa, the Philippines and North America in an effort to assist in the creation of a bamboo culture in North America. Matthew will be teaching courses about bamboo in the spring and autumn of each year. Contact bambooartisan@yahoo.com. This article has been provided courtesy of the Green Living Journal, a project of the Center for Holistic Ecology and the Cumberland Green Bioregional Council.