

Everything you ever wanted to know about bamboo

WASHINGTON—Bamboo - the makings of furniture and fishing rods, right? Yes, but it's much, much more. Its stiff, jointed stalks also

provide scaffolding for Hong Kong high-rises, meals for giant pandas, tools, toys, weapons, and medicine. One scientist even has distilled a

bamboo diesel fuel. No other growing thing has so many and so varied uses, asserts Luis Marden in an article in National

Geographic. The plant occurs naturally on every continent except Europe and Antarctica. A thousand species produce

stalks ranging from the size of field grass to 120-foot giants a foot thick.

They vary in color, shape, and size, but all feature a woody stalk. Most such stalks are hollow and are divided by joints called nodes.

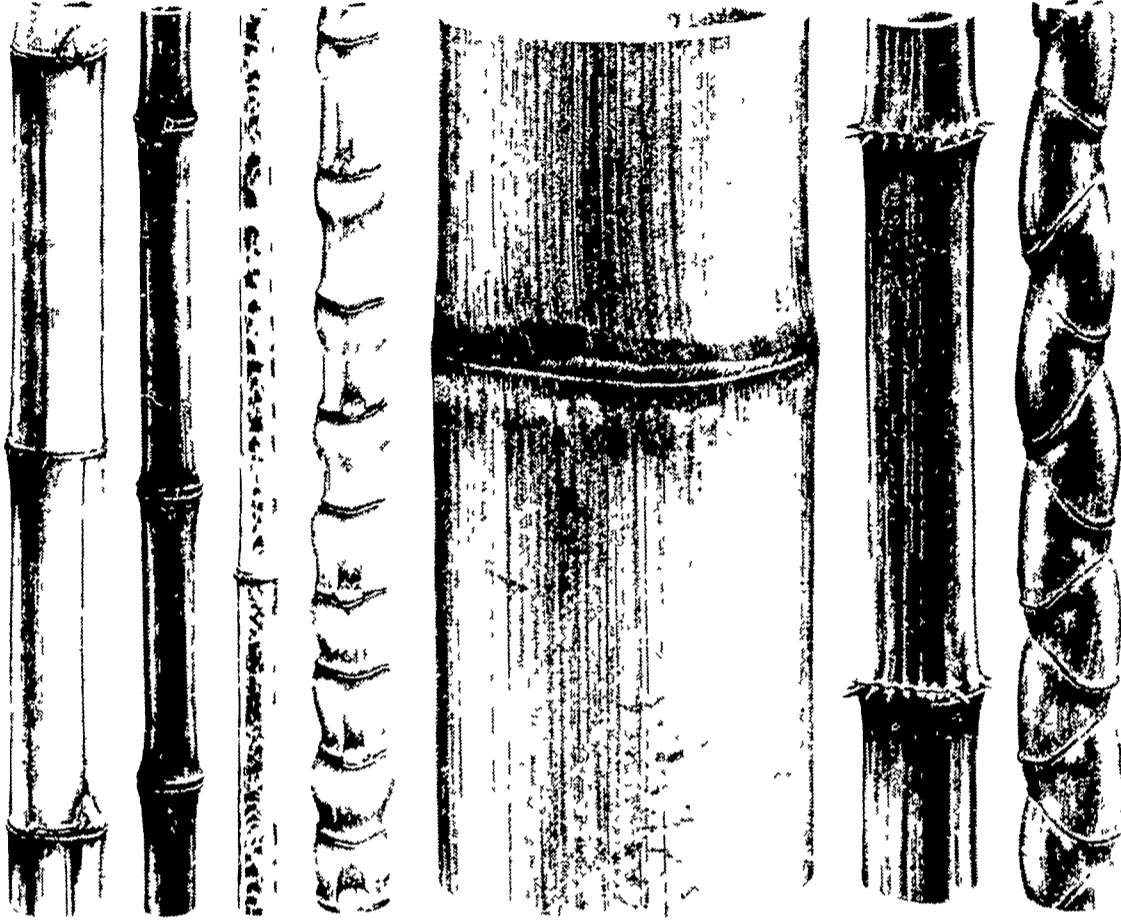
Bamboo is light, stiff, strong—and speedy. "No other living thing grows so tall so fast," Marden writes. One species in Japan grew almost 4 feet in 24 hours. "By watching closely, one should have been able to see it grow," he adds.

Bamboo typically sends up shoots every year. The

emerging sprouts reach their full size and height in 60 to 90 days. The stalks are mostly water at this point and, if cut, would crack during drying. They are ready for harvesting in three to five years.

Occasionally, the giant grass stops growing. Most bamboo flowers only rarely, say every 30, 60 or 120 years. Then-obeying a built-in genetic clock - every plant of that species anywhere in the world will burst into flower. With flowering, the stalks die.

The grove lives on because (Turn to Page C19)



Seven of bamboo's thousand or so species include, from the left, green striped, black, mottled, golden, giant, square and tortise-shell. The green striped is used to make paper. The giant can grow a foot across and makes good lumber. Most of these species are ornamental.



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