

# All about bamboo

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 some underground stems survive and seeds from the flowers takes root. But the seedlings may need five or 10 years to mature.  
 That wait can mean lean times for a bamboo grower or worse for the rare giant panda. Chinese scientists have found 140 dead pandas in the hills of Sichuan Province. The recent flowering of umbrella bamboo—a mainstay in the animal's diet—has experts worried that many of the world's pandas may survive.  
 In some ways, the history of southern Asia is the history of bamboo. Notes Dr. W. Y. Hsuing, China's leading bamboo authority: "Our earliest records, long before the invention of paper in the second century B.C., were written on slips of

green bamboo."  
 One book tells of the Chinese splitting and gluing strips of bamboo thousands of years ago. The same process produces bamboo fly rods today.  
 Bamboo shoots give texture and flavor to Chinese meals; thick cables of twisted bamboo suspends bridges; and herbal medicines of bamboo are used to treat fevers, prickly heat, coughs, and asthma.  
 China exports about 5,000 tons of tea stick bamboo a year. Much of it goes to Europe, where it is used for tomato supports, ski poles, fishing rods, furniture, or edge markers for snow-covered roads.  
 In Japan, bamboo is ever present. A classic wood-and-paper Japanese house has bamboo in its ceilings,

moldings, and gutters.  
 Flutes, bows and arrows, planting pots, scarecrows, fences and articles for the tea ceremony are a few of the items made from bamboo.  
 There is even a bamboo "wife," invented long ago as an air conditioner of sorts.  
 Explains Marden: "It is a woven basketwork cylinder about 5 feet long, which the sleeper embraces and throws one leg over, so that cooling breezes can pass through."  
 Bamboo not only can cool, but can light. A wax from inside young stalks once fueled candles in homes of great Oriental lords. Centuries later, inventor Thomas Edison needed a filament for his light bulb. He tried more than 6,000 materials and found charred fibers of bamboo the best, though tungsten has since

proved superior.  
 In India, bamboo frames the farmer's life. "As in China and Japan," Marden writes, "the Indian countryman used to have his umbilical cord cut with a bamboo knife. He is rocked to sleep in a bamboo cradle; as a man, he farms with tools made of it; he feeds it to his cattle, and eats it himself. Ultimately, he is carried to his grave on a bier made of bamboo."  
 More uses for the plant are being tested at a forestry research center north of New Delhi: as a reinforcement for concrete, a replacement for steel bolts, or laminated with plastic to make walls or boat hulls.  
 Bamboo is the source of two-thirds of India's paper.  
 "The yield of an acre of bamboo does not equal that of a softwood such as pine, but remember that a culm

(stalk) reaches full growth in two to three months and is harvestable in three to four years; a tree might take 20 years," Marden writes. "On a paper-hungry planet rapidly being denuded of its forests, bamboo may yet be a savior."

## Predictions for 70's trail corn yields actually achieved

DEKALB, IL. — A thoughtful article titled "Where Will Corn Yields Top Out in the Seventies?" was written 10 years ago by a nationally recognized, highly respected Midwest agronomist. When written, it represented some of the current best thinking about future corn yields.  
 In 1969, U.S. farmers harvested an 86 bushel-per-acre corn crop, up 31 bushels in nine years. Everything considered, said the author of the article, U.S. yields could be expected to fluctuate from about 75 to 85 bushels per acre, depending on weather during the 1970's. Actually, they fluctuated from 72 (in 1974) to 109 (1979) and averaged 89.6 over the 10 years.  
 The paper suggested that the total U.S. corn grain crop could be expected to be 6.21 billion bushels by 1980. Actually, it was about 6.41 in 1980, but that is 17 percent below the record set the previous year — well beyond what was considered a reasonable expectation 10 years earlier.

Even experts have historically tended to underestimate future agricultural productivity. Strong economic forces come into play and the American farmer is quick to seize what looks like an opportunity. Our forecaster may have anticipated some genetic improvement in corn hybrids, but he did not expect plant populations to continue to increase during the 1970s. Nor did he reckon that fertilizer application rates would become heavier throughout the decade.

The fact is that farmers improved most every facet of their cultural practices so they were ready when favorable weather blessed the 1978 and 1979 corn crops. Those same improved cultural practices prevented 1980 crops from being as disastrous as would have been true had the same heat and drought conditions occurred ten or more years ago.

Where are corn yields headed? They've been trending upward at one bushel per acre per year if you start with 1920's national 30-bushel yield average and assume 1980's to be 90. The trend line is steeper if you start with a more recent year, like 1955.

A look at world foods needs in the year 2000 convincingly shows that there will be very strong demand for grain products. Strong demand translates into favorable price. Given economic incentive, America's farmers will continue to adopt advanced technology and techniques.

Put improved hybrids and improved technology together on America's farms and it seems safe to predict higher corn yields during the 1980s and even higher productivity for the decade of the '90s. One to two bushels per acre per year seems entirely reasonable if one is to make a guess.



What is this season? A time for family gatherings. A time for fond remembrance, happy anticipation. A time for reflection, rededication. A time for reaching out to others. A time for joy. A time for kindness. A time for love. A time for peace. Best wishes for this holiday season.



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