

BAMBOO & ITS 1001 USES

Subject: bamboo

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Canebrake (& Other Bamboos)

Arundinaria sp. and others

The slogan on one of our tee shirts reads: Youâll Never Go Hungry with a Good Cane Pole. Unless You Try to Fish with It!

This exaggerates a bit, but canebrake is the familiar pole used so often over the last few centuries as a quickie fishing pole. In fact, growing as it does next to tempting bodies of catfish-filled pools and streams, canebrake has probably been responsible for more school absences than the flu!

Bamboos, including canebrake, make up the most useful subfamily of the Grass Family. In fact, bamboo is the most useful plant known to man.

The Japanese alone have more than 1,500 uses for this wonderful grass!

The green, woody, jointed poles of the bamboo form large colonies called brakes growing as tall as 50 feet. Grass-like leaves grow from jointed branches all along the trunk.

Bamboo grows faster than any other known plant as much as an inch every 40 minutes! But despite this ability, increasing pressures to use lands for other purposes has led to a decrease in the number of bamboo plantations. This does not bode well for the food, building materials, fuel, and paper industries that count heavily on this source.

Canebrake and switchcane are the only native U.S. varieties of bamboo. But I think canebrake is the best as a food source anyway.

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Harvesting canebrake for food is a bit different from harvesting most other bamboos. Pick canebrake shoots up to about 2â tall as long as they snap easily. Pick the other bamboos only up to about 6 tall, just as they begin to break through the ground. Find both during the spring.

Bamboo shoots generally crack the earth shortly before shooting out of the ground. If possible, dig around the shoot and harvest it before it rises above ground.

Light yellow to light brown shoots of bamboo and canebrake are most tender and make the tastiest meals. Darker colors purple to black indicate an older, less palatable plant.

The nutritional content of bamboo, according to Peter Bindon, head of the anthropology department at the Western Australian Museum in Perth, Australia, is ãabout the same as an equivalent weight of onion.

Uncontrolled harvesting can damage bamboo. Try to collect no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the shoots in any given brake. Leave the larger ones to grow tall. In two to four years, these will be ideal building materials for fences, furniture, buildings, and many other items.

Harvest the rice-like seeds of the bamboos all year. Use a procedure similar to that used for wild rice tip the plant over a sheet or container and hit it with a stick to shake the seed free.

BAMBOO SHOOTS AS A VEGETABLE

Peel away any sheathing from canebrake. You may want to boil other bamboos before peeling.

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If you do not intend to cook the shoots right away, leave the sheathing attached till you are ready to cook. Preserve the shoots for a few hours in cold water, or up to a week in the refrigerator.

Beyond this, they should be pickled.

Cut or break the shoots into smaller 1 to 1, pieces. Slice the rounder pieces into strips.

Boil the strips for about 20 minutes in slightly salted water. Canebrake is ready to eat as soon as it is drained. Season with salt and pepper and top with butter. The taste resembles sweet corn.

You may wish to boil other bamboos in one or two changes of water. After boiling, peel the shoots with a sharp knife.

Bamboo shoots, boiled or steamed, make a good dish alone or as a side dish with a meat course. You may even want to add a few to a fresh salad!

BAMBOO SEED

Prepare the seeds of bamboo much as you would cereal or rice. Wash the seed in cool water. Put a cup of seed into an uncovered pot with a cup of water and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt. Heat to a hard boil, then simmer (still uncovered). When the water is gone, add a cup of chicken or turkey broth. Mix in a little meat, if you like.

Continue to simmer till the liquid is gone and the rice (seed) is tender. Serve hot!

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