

Plants - Bamboo-Some Uses and Facts

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Canebrake (*Arundinaria* sp.) and other species

The slogan on one of our tee shirts reads: You'll 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 land 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 and I think canebrake is the best as a food source.

Harvesting canebrake for food is a bit different from harvesting most other bamboos. Pick canebrake shoots up to about 2' 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.

Happy harvesting.