



BAMBOO

The Magazine of the American Bamboo Society

GHOST GENES IN THE CANEBRAKE

Discover the hidden
genetic history of
North American bamboo

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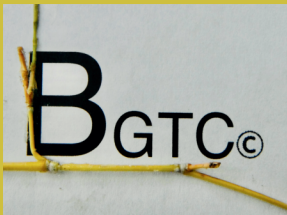
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Arundinaria gigantea in Greenwood County, SC. Credit: Jimmy Triplett

Join Us

The American Bamboo Society is a volunteer-run organization devoted to providing information on bamboos via its magazine and online journal, promoting bamboo for the public and botanical gardens, increasing the number of species in the U.S., disseminating research about its uses and potential, and to support bamboo research.

To learn more information about joining the ABS, visit <https://www.bamboo.org/membership-information> or scan the QR code.



ON THE COVER

Arundinaria gigantea canebrake in Garrard County, KY
Credit: Jimmy Triplett

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ABS NEWS

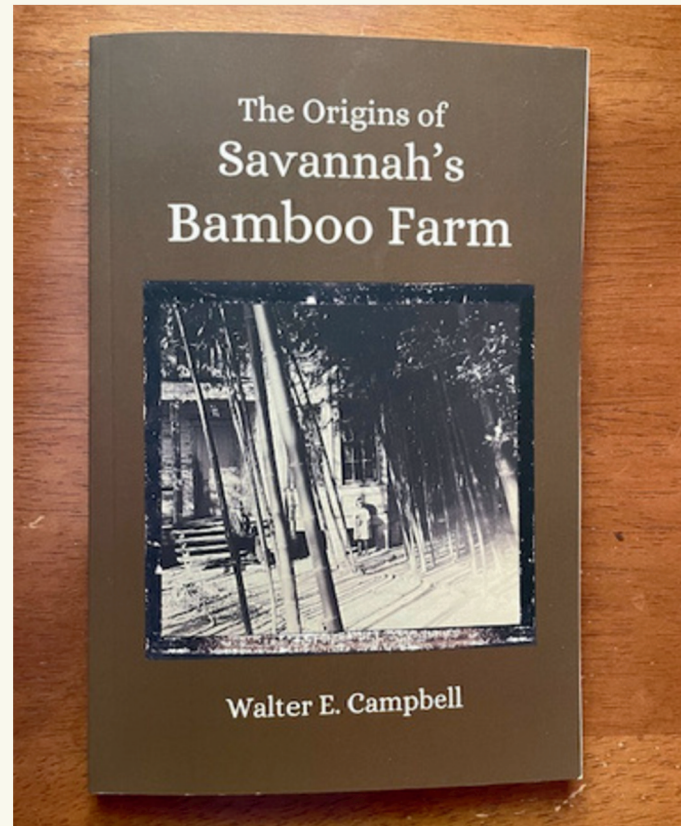
IN REMEMBRANCE: WALTER CAMPBELL

By Kay Koppedraye

I first met Dr. Walter Campbell when he came to a meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the American Bamboo Society sometime in 2017 or so. We were in Savannah, at the former USDA plant introduction station, now the Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens. If you've ever been there, you'll know the grounds contain one of the most impressive collections of bamboo in the southeast. During the decades when the site was under USDA control, it was America's premier bamboo research station. Now it is a legacy site.

Walt's topic the day he came to our meeting was about the history of the original bamboo planting on those grounds at the turn of the 20th century, when the site was just a simple family farm situated along an empty, dusty road. His presentation was full of marvelous anecdotes about all the comings and goings of entrepreneurs and businessmen and wealthy widows and shrewd farmers, some rich and some poor, all of whom were taken in one way or another that maybe bamboo would prove itself to be a commercial crop.

As a group, we were spellbound. As I listened, I knew we were encountering a masterful story-teller, one who could weave a most fascinating account out of a simple story of a woman who decided one day to put a couple of bamboo plants in the ground. He did it because behind that presentation was a mountain of research that spared no detail.



Every event, every circumstance, every name, every participant in the story was carefully researched. Or, as Mary Lee put it recently, no fact was too small to go unresearched.

Walt illustrated his talk with old photographs, maps, news clippings, and all manner of other material that he dug out the many archives he'd visited. Looking at these images, I could only think about the effort—and dedication—it took to track down this material. He was a relentless historian.

ABS NEWS

IN REMEMBRANCE: WALTER CAMPBELL

That first encounter led to a friendship and to many more instances to be impressed by Walt's skills. In 2021, the American Bamboo Society convened its first annual gathering after the pandemic. People were still nervous about travel and edgy about crowds. Just prior to the Meet and Great the evening before the gathering's first day, one of the organizers got word that the opening speaker had canceled. Other speakers were not scheduled to arrive until later that morning. Scrambling to find someone to fill in that opening slot, she approached Walt and asked if he could put something together to tide everyone over until the next speaker arrived. It was 8:00 in the evening. Nine AM the next day, the conference opened with a marvelous talk replete with illustrations on the USDA's push to get poor southern farmers growing bamboo. Again, the audience was spellbound. Walt had done his magic once again.

He was not only an outstanding historian, he was also most generous with his material. It's a trait more scholars ought to cultivate. I can't begin to count the number of times I'd call him or he'd call me about something and we'd get to talking about some relatively unknown player from the USDA's involvement with bamboo or about some event that took place somewhere. I'd hang up, and then, sure enough, twenty minutes later, a file would land in my email inbox containing archival material related to what we had been talking about. Usually it was not just one document, but a slew of them, all carefully organized. He always had source material at his fingertips. Same for the research contacts he had. There was always someone he knew or somebody he could call.



When he fell ill, Walt felt it was time to share the material he had gathered with other researchers. To that end, he copied to an external hard drive all the files in his database and arranged to give it to me. I think we both knew that an historian's papers, even those in an electronic format, are too precious to send in the mail, so we arranged a meeting at Savannah's Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens, the Historic Bamboo Farm he so carefully researched. His giving me that hard drive and all the files it contains was an extraordinary gift.

Last summer, Walt was able to see his manuscript of the early history of that Bamboo Farm through to publication. That book, one of the several he wrote, is part of his legacy, another gift to anyone interested in the way bamboo came to be part of the American landscape.

Walt was a dear friend. I will miss him very much.

ABS NEWS

BAMBOO CO-OPS

By Autumn Ramsay

Just off the buses for our very first stop of the conference, we trekked a short distance through the Moso bamboo grove until we came to a wide clearing that included benches made out of bamboo. As folks got settled in, there was an introduction to kick off the 2025 ABS conference by Michelle Tkach and James Clever then we rolled right into: Bamboo Co-Ops

“How many of you grow Moso bamboo?” - Autumn

Many hands went up.

“How many of you make things out of bamboo, but don’t grow it yourself?” A couple hands went up.

I found myself in the latter category - Artisan; I’ve been searching for a local bamboo supplier for a few craft kits because I can’t grow it out on my apartment balcony (with neighbors above me).

The idea of bamboo co-ops is all about providing a bamboo network or “grove” that we can all thrive from. Growers, Artisans, Recyclers, and Bio-Refiners already exist somewhere in the world; it’s a matter of spreading that knowledge among the grove to maximize bamboo’s potential.

If you would like to sign up for the bamboo co-op, please reach out to Autumn Ramsay (bammer25mashell@gmail.com) or your local ABS representative.

- Growers - A local bamboo supplier/nursery or your next door neighbor with a bamboo planting.
- Artisans - Using bamboo material to create a refined product. Ex: Bamboo Cutting Boards, Bamboo Straws, Bamboo Tea, Bamboo Shoots in Pesto, etc.
- Recyclers - A small group currently, though this is where bamboo can really shine in sustainability and reusability. Creating new products from either Artisan material waste or discarded bamboo products - Ex: Bamboo Cutting Boards to Bamboo Straws, Spoons, Forks, Knives, Shirts, etc.
- Bio-Refiners - This is considered the “end-of-life” for bamboo products. Biochar and Biofuel are fantastic examples. You can recycle used bamboo straws, chopsticks, bamboo shoot leaves into Biochar and Biofuel - utilizing both for the bamboo growers.

As we gathered for lunch, multiple folks from across the world (including Guatemala and the Philippines) signed up for the co-op. Currently, I’ve entered about half the members into the database and will be reaching out about your introduction email including your co-op member id (if you have not received an email already).

Stay tuned for more co-op news in the future including local workshops and partnerships!

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ABS NEWS

A NEW EDIBLE BAMBOO IN THE U.S.

By Mark Sanders

Bamboo importation to the United States from abroad is a long and complicated process, with logistical challenges that make the effort a considerable undertaking. Many species imported by experts such as Cliff Sussman, Robert Saporito and others are chosen for their unique aesthetic features. However a new import is being brought to the U.S. for more practical reasons. Namely, food.

According to Kevin Barley, president of Zolfo Springs-based company Florida Fresh Bamboo, a new type of bamboo may be on America's dinner tables in the not-too-distant future.

Florida Fresh Bamboo touts itself as "the only source for American grown and jarred bamboo." Through another Florida-based company, PrimeTech (formerly BamCore), Barley learned of a cultivar of *Dendrocalamus asper* that grows considerably larger than those currently used by his company for edible bamboo shoot production.

"As I understand, it's the same species," Barley says, speaking from his office in Florida. "But this asper is twice as tall as the kind we've been using." Notably, Florida Fresh Bamboo's farmland grows asper that reaches 50' at maturity, with 4-6" culms. The new variety, currently in USDA quarantine, reaches a maximum height of 90', with a culm diameter reaching upwards of 12".

"This bamboo is so big, it will make you fall off your chair," Barley says. He notes that 70% of Florida Fresh Bamboo's harvests go towards edible shoot production, while the other 30% goes towards bamboo lumber. By scaling up, Barley and his team expect production cycles in 2027 and beyond to be vastly more plentiful than ever.

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ABS NEWS

MEET NEW ABS PRESIDENT IAN CONNOR

By Mark Sanders

In late 2025, Portland, Oregon-based landscaper and bamboo expert Ian Connor became the American Bamboo Society's new president.

Connor has been in the horticulture business since the 1980s. A British native, his interest in plants began as a teenager, working at a family nursery, "growing generic trees and shrubs," he says.

After a two-year stint in college, Connor decided that gardening suited him better than academics, and began focusing his attention on growing (both literally and figuratively) within the green industry. He moved to London, and within six months of his arrival was running landscaping crews working in the gardens of some of the city's wealthiest residents.

"These were compact urban gardens, where not even a rose petal was allowed to touch the ground," he says. Eventually he found himself working at Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, a lush green space whose aim was, according to its website, "to bring together the most comprehensive and unrivaled collection of trees, shrubs and hardy plants in the UK." Founded in the 1950s by Sir Harold Hillier, first as a plant nursery and later a botanical garden open to the public, it was a wonderful introduction to the plant world at large. Connor would later go to work at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (better known simply as Kew Gardens), where he deepened his knowledge about the plant world.



Connor recalls his introduction to bamboo as less of a "Eureka!" moment, and more as a chance occurrence.

While working on a restoration project involving bamboo, he informed himself about bamboo flowering, spreading, transplanting and renovating an existing stand of *Phyllostachys flexuosa*. He worked in a grove of this and *Phyllostachys aurea*, pruning culms and constructing a bamboo tunnel for visitors to walk through. That expertise led to more exposure, more exposure, and at Kew, more opportunities to dive deep into the world of bamboo.

ABS NEWS

MEET NEW ABS PRESIDENT IAN CONNOR

Through his Kew connection, Connor was introduced to the work of bamboo pioneer Altonon Bertram Freeman-Mitford, whose 1896 book *The Bamboo Garden* is a prime reference book for bamboo enthusiasts.

As valuable as Freeman-Mitford's work was to the bamboo community, the book stood alone. "At that time," Connor says, "It was the dark ages, a big dearth of information on bamboo." He endeavored to correct that, writing and lecturing about bamboo. He made inroads with The Linnean Society, a London-based organization founded in 1788 dedicated to communicating about nature to the public. It is the world's oldest organization devoted to natural history.

Through the society, Connor met then-ABS president Susanne Lucas and bamboo pioneers Ned Jaquith and Adam Turtle.

After arriving in Philadelphia in 1997, Connor worked at an arboretum where he developed a lecture series for botanical gardens in the Northeast. His writing continued, which deepened both his knowledge and his connection to the bamboo community in the U.S.

Eventually Connor found himself at Bamboo Garden Nursery in Oregon, working with Jaquith while also volunteering and installing bamboo at a Chinese garden in Portland.

Jaquith and Lucas were both instrumental in Connor's efforts to get his visa. The process of doing so was so arduous that he describes it as "devastating."

The logistical hoops were absolutely worth jumping through, he says, because working in the U.S. afforded opportunities that he could have never imagined back home. "I'd never have gotten the career opportunities if I'd stayed in Britain," Connor says. "Here, I get to appreciate so much more with bamboo."

He credits the American Bamboo Society with creating the life he's made in Oregon. At the heart of the organization, he notes, are people he has worked with in order to achieve long-term goals.

Connor describes in direct terms the connection of the ABS to his ability to live in the U.S.: "It's because of the ABS that I'm here." Through his service on the organization's board of directors, previously as vice president and today as president, he says, "I get the chance to pay back what the ABS has given me."



ABS NEWS

THE NED JAQUITH FOUNDATION: JOB OPPORTUNITY



Ned Jaquith
FOUNDATION

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For more information about the NJF, please see the website, www.nedjaquithfoundation.org

If this position interests you, please contact Susanne Lucas at susannelucas@gmail.com.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

CHARISSA BROCK

BY MARK SANDERS

Charissa Brock is an Oregon-based artist whose passion and craft are bamboo. Her intricate designs pay homage to the cultural history of the plant while messaging the importance of ecologically conscious living.

“Not only does bamboo have resonant energy, but there’s a feelgood aspect of it,” she says, speaking on the phone in a recent interview. “If you know how to harness the beast, it has so much potential to help in the world.” Her commitment to art is matched by her commitment to sustainability.

Her experience with plant-based and recycled art dates back to the early 1990s, when Brock worked with paper sculptures and basketry, later teaching college students about the use of found materials in nature. For one of these projects, Brock needed natural materials found at Abington Art Center, located north of Philadelphia. The groundskeeper at Abington told her that there were no trees scheduled for cutting, from which she would have harvested bark, but offered bamboo to use. Despite her unfamiliarity with the plant, Brock soon began experimenting. “I was awestruck with bamboo,” Brock says. A lifelong interest was born.

Meeting with bamboo experts including *Bamboo in Japan* author Nancy Moore Bess and TIA Modern Gallery founder Robert Coffland further moved Brock towards bamboo. Revered Japanese basketmaker Jiro Yonizawa also had a lasting impact on her work.



And, like so many bamboo enthusiasts and experts in recent years, meeting Bamboo Garden Nursery founder Ned Jaquith proved pivotal to her appreciation for the plant. “He taught me everything I know,” Brock says.

“He was influential, and my work wouldn’t exist in this format without him.” Brock would go on to work at Bamboo Garden for years, learning about bamboo while developing her craft.

These days, Brock’s bamboo comes from different sources including canes that are thinned at Bamboo Garden, as well as material donated by individuals. Her preferred species are *Phyllostachys nigra ‘Bory’* (“my alltime favorite,” she says) and Moso.

You can learn more about Charissa Brock’s work by visiting her website, charissabrock.com.



GHOST GENES IN THE CANEBRAKE

A journey into the
hidden genetic history
of North American
bamboo

BY JIMMY TRIPLETT

*On a night when moonlight
gathers on the bamboo leaves,
it is easy to mistake
this place for a village in falling snow.*

*—Anonymous waka, medieval Japan
(ca. 10th–13th century)*

Some of the most surprising things about biology hide in places we think we know well. Even familiar plants and animals seem straightforward at first glance—until closer inspection dismantles our assumptions about how life is supposed to work.

In the deserts of the American Southwest, certain whiptail lizards consist entirely of females. No males. No mating in the usual sense. These lizards reproduce by cloning—each daughter a genetic copy of her mother. Even more remarkable, many of these all-female species arose when two ordinary sexual species hybridized and their genomes first teamed up and then doubled—a process called polyploidy—leaving every cell with four complete sets of chromosomes. In evolutionary terms, a new species appeared almost overnight. Hybridization and polyploidy are like Darwinian superpowers.

Male honeybees present another twist. They hatch from unfertilized eggs and carry only a single set of chromosomes. A male bee has a mother, but no father. Female honeybees, on the other hand, develop from fertilized eggs and have two sets of chromosomes, just like humans. Sisters share about 75 percent of their genes on average, far more than the typical 50 percent in humans—an extraordinary level of relatedness that helps shape the evolution of cooperation in bee colonies.

On the surface, these systems could not look more different. But beneath them runs a shared message: Nature does not follow a single rulebook. Hybridization, cloning, haploidy, and polyploidy are not accidents. They are strategies.

Genomes also carry echoes of strategies that no longer operate. Humans, for example, carry hundreds of “false genes” (pseudogenes)—broken copies of genes that once worked but have since fallen silent. Many of them are relics of our ancestral sense of smell. As primates evolved sharper vision, many olfactory genes quietly decayed. Their DNA remains in our chromosomes like abandoned buildings in an old neighborhood. Genetic ghosts.

And sometimes ghosts tell remarkable stories.



The Strange Genomes of Bamboo

Bamboo evolution is full of these quiet revelations. And despite decades of research, bamboo scientists still encounter puzzles that require careful sleuthing to untangle. Hybridization, genome duplication, and complex ancestry are woven deeply into bamboo evolutionary history.

Like whiptail lizards, woody bamboos are the products of ancient hybridization followed by polyploid speciation. Plants use this trick far more liberally than animals—and bamboo is one of the most dramatic examples.



Whereas humans carry two copies of each chromosome in every cell, temperate woody bamboos like river cane carry four copies. Their genomes formed when two ancestral lineages merged long before modern species appeared. Along the way, some genes fell silent and became ghost genes, while others found new lives through new functions. That layered history still shapes bamboo today, helping explain its unusual traits: massive culms, woody tissues, long clonal lifespans, and flowering cycles that may take decades to complete. In a real sense, every bamboo plant carries two evolutionary histories woven into one body.

Hybridization, polyploidy, gene families, and ghost genes are not just features of American cane but are also defining traits of the entire temperate bamboo lineage, stretching from the Appalachian Mountains to the forests of Asia.

Nowhere is bamboo's mosaic legacy more visible than in Japan, where multiple temperate bamboo lineages grow side by side. Familiar genera such as *Phyllostachys*, *Pleioblastus*, and *Sasa* (Japanese timber bamboo, Japanese river cane, and the understory *Sasa* bamboos) are distinct in form, habit, and ecology—and yet over evolutionary time, these lineages repeatedly crossed genetic boundaries. The result was not chaos, but creativity. *Hibanobambusa*, *Pseudosasa*, *Sasaella*, and *Semiarundinaria*—the icons of elegant bamboo gardens—are products of mosaic ancestry, with features shuffled together from multiple ancestral sources. What makes these intergeneric hybrids so revealing is not just that they exist, but that many have stabilized into fully recognizable species, persisting for perhaps thousands of years. Hybridization in bamboo is not merely an evolutionary curiosity. It is a creative force.

The Long Patience of Bamboo

One of the great mysteries of bamboo biology is why so many species wait decades—sometimes more than a century—before flowering. Entire forests bloom together, then collapse, and begin again from seed.

What if this delay is not a quirk, but a strategy?

A bamboo clone spends decades building a formidable structure of rhizomes, culms, and branches. This living architecture is its competitive advantage. Flowering destroys it. Once a bamboo clone invests in reproduction, culms die. The architectural lattice collapses. What returns from seed is small and fragile—thin stems where giants once stood. The clone must begin again from scratch.

So perhaps bamboo delays flowering not because it cannot flower sooner, but because it gains so much by waiting. Its ancient polyploid genome, forged through hybridization, may have strengthened this strategy—enhancing vegetative vigor and loosening the regulatory systems that control flowering time. Hybrid ancestry, too, can alter flowering pathways, sometimes delaying or destabilizing them. Not all bamboos follow the same schedule, and the full picture remains unresolved. But the pattern is consistent with what we know about clonal plants, polyploid genomes, and long-lived perennials. Bamboo's long wait is not hesitation. It is investment.



The Four Native Bamboos of North America

For a long time, many botanists believed North America had only one native bamboo—river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*)—or perhaps two, adding switch cane (*A. tecta*). Fieldwork, herbarium research, and molecular data have since revealed a richer story. Today we recognize four distinct species, each shaped by a different ecological world. Meeting them is like meeting cousins who have grown up in very different neighborhoods.

If any plant deserves to be called the elder statesman of American bamboo, it is river cane (*A. gigantea*). It grows along the great floodplains of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee Rivers, where it once formed vast, nearly impenetrable canebrakes. River cane grows tall and clean, with smooth yellow-green stems and culm leaves that fall away early. Its rhizomes lack air canals, reflecting a life on well-drained alluvial soils. If you imagine bamboo rising through mist along a broad southern river, you are picturing river cane.

Move southeast into blackwater swamps and forested wetlands and the story changes. Here lives switch cane (*A. tecta*), built for life in saturated soils. Its stems retain shaggy culm leaves. Its leaves are thick and leathery. Its rhizomes contain air canals—tiny internal snorkels that allow survival in flooded ground.



Look closely at the base of each branch and you will see a stack of compressed internodes, like the collapsed sections of a handheld telescope. Switch cane rarely grows as tall as river cane, but it is exquisitely tuned to its watery world.

Climb into the southern Appalachians and you meet hill cane (*A. appalachiana*), a species that eluded recognition for more than a century. Smaller in stature, often forming rounded patches under open forest canopies, hill cane looks a little like switch cane at first glance. But the details tell a different story. Its foliage leaves are thin and papery, often fluttering away in autumn. Its rhizomes typically lack the prominent air canals of switch cane, reflecting its upland lifestyle. Genetically, hill cane is the sister species to switch cane—two branches of the same lineage that adapted to very different ecosystems.

The newest member of the family is Tallapoosa cane (*A. alabamensis*), described only recently from east-central Alabama. It grows in upland forests near sandstone outcrops and small drainages—places where botanical surprises like to hide. Tallapoosa cane stands out with its large leaves, unusually long-hairy leaf sheaths, and distinctive branching. Its genetic fingerprint is a fascinating mosaic: Chloroplast DNA links it to river cane, while nuclear DNA aligns it with the switch-hill cane lineage. Tallapoosa cane is not a transient hybrid. It is a lineage that has stabilized into something wholly its own—a species shaped by ancient blending, now fully itself.

The Ghost of the Canebrake

Once, cane dominated vast stretches of the southeastern United States. Early naturalists described canebrakes so dense and tall that a rider on horseback could disappear inside them. These bamboo forests shaped wildlife communities, stabilized floodplain soils, and influenced fire patterns across entire river systems.

Today, most people have never seen a true canebrake. Agriculture, grazing, river engineering, and fire suppression reduced them to scattered remnants. The great canebrakes have become ecological ghosts.

And yet cane persists. Switch cane still hangs in shadowed swamps. Hill cane still rounds quiet Appalachian slopes. Tallapoosa cane still catches morning light in hidden Alabama forests. For Indigenous peoples of the Southeast, cane has never been merely a plant. It was the source of baskets, mats, arrows, fish traps, and shelters—some of the finest baskets ever woven in North America were made from split river cane. The craft continues today, though the raw material grows harder to find.

Field botanists have long noticed cane plants that don't fit the descriptions. Leaves the wrong thickness. Branch structures that seem intermediate. For decades the question lingered: were these unusual forms, overlooked species, or hybrids? Molecular data finally provided the answer. Using genome fingerprinting techniques such as AFLPs and chloroplast DNA sequencing, we detected clear signatures of hybrid individuals, particularly where river cane and switch cane grow near one another. Their DNA carries fragments from both parental species—a pattern no pure species could produce.



Seen through this global lens, genetic blending among North American canes becomes less mysterious. It is not an anomaly. It is the regional expression of a pattern that has been reshaping temperate bamboos across the Northern Hemisphere for millions of years.

Bamboo evolution behaves less like a tidy branching tree and more like a braided river, with channels dividing, merging, and forming new paths. Species remain real. But their histories are often interwoven.

A Genetic Toolkit for Identifying Cane

The American bamboo identity crisis became the basis for a research project in my lab at Jacksonville State University, where undergraduate researcher Emma Higginbotham and I began testing an “old-fashioned” set of molecular markers called ISSRs (Inter-Simple Sequence Repeats), a technique that dates back to the 1990s.

Think of them as genetic barcodes scattered across the genome. When amplified using PCR, they produce distinctive banding patterns—like a musical chord on a staff—that can distinguish one species from another.

Sequencing an entire genome would provide definitive answers, but it is expensive and time-consuming. ISSRs offer something different: speed. In a single afternoon we can often determine whether a plant is river cane, switch cane, hill cane, Tallapoosa cane—or a hybrid between them. This tool does not replace traditional taxonomy. It strengthens it, particularly for conservation planning and for Indigenous communities working to revive cane-based traditions.

The Overlooked Extraordinary

Bamboo does not grow near parking lots. It grows in storms, swamps, and steep forgotten places. Beauty often hides at the edges of our attention: along abandoned floodplains, in upland forests where hill cane whispers in the wind, along dark river bends where switch cane leans toward the water.

I have collected cane beneath approaching Appalachian thunder, lightning flickering across the sky. I have stood perfectly still as a wild boar and her piglets trotted past in the rain, oblivious to me. I have been engulfed by mosquitoes that seemed genuinely delighted by the novelty of a human visitor. These are the moments I return to when I think about why this work matters.

To know a plant well is to begin seeing the entire landscape around it more clearly.

When I first began studying bamboo, I assumed the great stories belonged elsewhere—to the famous groves of China or the mountains of Japan. It took years to realize that the American story is just as deep, just as strange, and just as beautiful.

Here is a lineage built from ancient genome mergers, shaped by hybridization, adapted to floods and swamps and mountains, once dominant across whole river systems, still quietly holding on. Cane teaches a different lesson from the spectacles that usually command our attention: the familiar can be extraordinary, the overlooked can be ancient, and evolutionary history often hides in plain sight.

The story we tell about bamboo is the same story we tell about whiptail lizards and bees. Life is more inventive than we expect. What looks like strangeness turns out to be strategy. What looks like delay turns out to be design. And what looks like a scruffy thicket along a forgotten riverbank turns out to be one of the most remarkable life histories on the continent—its past written not in rarity or spectacle, but in the ghost-marked chromosomes of an ordinary cane.



Further Reading About Native North American Bamboos

- On the hybrid origins of temperate bamboos. Triplett, J.K., Clark, L.G., Fisher, A.E., and Wen, J. (2014). Independent allopolyploidization events preceded speciation in the temperate and tropical woody bamboos. *New Phytologist* 204: 66–73. The paper that established the polyploid genomic foundations discussed in this article. Using nuclear DNA from nearly 40 species across 27 genera, the authors traced the ancient hybridization events that gave rise to temperate and tropical woody bamboo lineages and showed that genome doubling preceded the diversification of modern bamboo species.
- The latest word on bamboo genomes: Ma, P.-F., Liu, Y.-L., Guo, C., et al. (2024). Genome assemblies of 11 bamboo species highlight diversification induced by dynamic subgenome dominance. *Nature Genetics* 56: 710–720. A landmark genomic study assembling chromosome-level genomes for 11 bamboo species across diploid, tetraploid, and hexaploid lineages. The authors show that the two ancestral subgenomes of woody bamboos behave differently from one another—one tends to dominate gene expression—and that this dynamic helps explain bamboo's distinctive traits, including rapid culm growth and synchronized flowering cycles.
- On hybridization across the temperate bamboos: Triplett, J.K. and Clark, L.G. (2021). Hybridization in the temperate bamboos (*Poaceae: Bambusoideae: Arundinarieae*): A phylogenetic study using AFLPs and cpDNA sequence data. *Systematic Botany* 46: 48–69. A broad survey of hybridization across the temperate bamboo tribe, including North American and Asian taxa. This study documents the reticulate evolutionary history of the group—the "braided river" pattern described in the article—using genome fingerprinting and chloroplast DNA, and places North American hybridization in a global context.
- On the discovery of hill cane: Triplett, J.K., Weakley, A.S., and Clark, L.G. (2006). Hill cane (*Arundinaria appalachiana*), a new species of bamboo (*Poaceae: Bambusoideae*) from the southern Appalachian Mountains. *SIDA* 22: 79–95. The formal description of hill cane, a species that had gone unrecognized for more than a century. The paper details the morphological and ecological features that distinguish it from switch cane, and situates the new species within the broader taxonomy of North American *Arundinaria*.
- On the discovery of Tallapoosa cane: Triplett, J.K. (2023). Tallapoosa cane (*Arundinaria alabamensis*), a new species of temperate bamboo (*Poaceae: Bambusoideae*) from east-central Alabama. *Phytotaxa* 600: 185–202. The formal description of the most recently recognized North American bamboo, currently known from just eight populations in four Alabama counties. The paper documents the species' distinctive morphology, its unusual genetic fingerprint—with chloroplast DNA linking it to river cane and nuclear DNA linking it to the switch-hill cane lineage—and includes an identification key to all four native *Arundinaria* species.
- On river cane restoration and collaboration with Indigenous communities: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (2024). Collaboration for River Cane Restoration. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. <https://www.fws.gov/project/collaboration-river-cane-restoration>. A collaborative restoration initiative focused on rebuilding river cane ecosystems across the southeastern United States. The project brings together federal agencies, conservation groups, and Indigenous communities to restore canebrakes that once dominated southeastern floodplains. Beyond ecological restoration—improving habitat for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife—the effort also supports the revival of traditional cultural uses of river cane, including basketry and other crafts that depend on healthy, sustainable cane stands.

Made in

HOW A
POPULAR
BAMBOO
FURNISHING
BECAME A
MUST-HAVE
ITEM IN
EARLY 1900S
AMERICAN
HOMES.

BY KAY KOPPEDRAYER

America



Bamboo furnishings were hot items in North America at the turn of the 20th century. Among the most popular items were bamboo portieres known under the trade name of *sidarris**. Today they would simply be known as bamboo blinds or bamboo shades. An 1894 article in the Canadian newspaper, Kingston's *Daily British Whig*, explained their use (July 18, 1894). Describing the blinds as made from the "finest split canes held together by a weaving of knotted cord and so flexible that they roll as readily as a hartshorn shade...a deep dull green and so thin that tempered sunshine sifts through," the article explained that sidarris were a must-have addition to home furnishings.

Indeed, in homes, everywhere, as a description from New York shows:

Several years ago these rolling curtains of split bamboo made their appearance in this city under the name of Sidarris, and they were found so useful that they soon became popular, particularly in the suburban towns. The suburban New Yorker had fallen into the habit of living much in public when outside the walls of his house. Fashion decreed long ago that the front fence must come down, and the piazza, usually not far from the street, was so exposed that it was useless for comfortable lounging, and demanded the same dress that must be worn for walking or calling. The bamboo curtain came to remedy this evil, and to give to the American piazza greater privacy and comfort. It is cheap enough for the smallest cottage, pretty enough for the most expensive, and useful for everybody who has a piazza. Like most things that are cheap, pretty and useful, it has made a place for itself.

– 1893, *Carpet & Upholstery Trade Review*, p.47

*Editor's note: "Sudares" is an alternative spelling.


Advertisements for sidarris appeared in newspapers especially in areas where people maintained summer homes. A. A. Vantine & Co., an import store in New York City specializing in "Useful and artistic products of the Orient for the Furnishing of Summer Homes," ran large newspaper and magazine advertisements that included mention siddaris – bamboo porch shades – for more than a decade. One of the earliest is an 1894 ad in New York's *Evening Post*. It took up half the page and included Oriental rugs, bamboo furniture, Japanese screens, Turkish coffee tables, Cairo folding stands, fine Japanese porcelain, Chinese mats, and other popular furnishings as well as the bamboo blinds.

A complete assortment of
Sidarris
Porch Shades
 for season of 1894,
 made in Reed and Split
 Bamboo.

	Regular price.	Less
3x 6 feet,	0.75 each.	25%.
4x 6 "	1.00 "	57c.
4x 8 "	1.25 "	94c.
5x 8 "	1.60 "	1.20
6x 8 "	2.00 "	1.50
7x 8 "	2.25 "	1.69
8x 8 "	2.50 "	1.88
8x10 "	3.25 "	2.44
10x12 "	4.75 "	3.57
12x12 "	5.75 "	4.32
15x12 "	7.25 "	5.44

**COMPLETE WITH TACKLE,
 READY TO HANG,**

**Bamboo and Bead
 Portieres**
 3¼ feet wide, 8½ feet long.



Black Bamboo
 75c. less 25 per cent., **57c. each**

From the *New York Evening Post*, May 26, 1894

In this advertisement, the listing for sidarris was right at the top of the third column, in effect, the first item someone scanning the page would see. Made from reed and split bamboo, these shades were available in eleven sizes, “complete with tackle and ready to hang.” The largest of the lot, a shade measuring 15 feet by 12 feet ordinarily went for \$7.25. However, at a sale price of 25% off, a buyer could get it for only \$5.44. That cost might seem quite reasonable, until you calculate the buying power of \$5 in today’s terms. It would come to around \$180!

A. A. Vantine & Co., “The Oriental Store” as the operation billed itself, continued to run advertisements for Japanese and Chinese goods in national publications up through 1909. The ads often appeared on the outside back cover of the publication, a prime location for maximum visibility. That was the placement of the company’s advertisement in the July, 1909, issues of the two publications, *The Suburbanite* and *Country Life in America*. Aimed at those who could get away from the cities during the summer months, the ad observed that the “summer home *best* [italics in original] fulfills its mission of restful comfort when fitted with the harmonious, adaptable furnishings of the Orient.” Where to find those fitments? At A. A. Vantine & Co., of course. Whether for “the Bungalow, cottage, or yacht,” the Vantine lines of goods “will give the results [italics in original] your taste crave most.” And again, included among the listings for table porcelain, furniture, cushions, and more were the porch screens, the sidarris.

This advertisement, like many others, identifies the bamboo blinds first and foremost by the term sidarris, taking it for granted that readers were familiar with the term. Magazine articles about verandas do the same, as seen in a 1905 *Good Housekeeping* article on furnishing a roof garden or veranda.

The writer simply observes that “sidarris are the ideal wall and ceiling hanging.” Same in a June 1893 article in *Harper’s Bazaar*. Now, however, the term is long out of currency, and its origins unknown. By around 1915, the term had dropped out of favor. Any mention of these bamboo shades called them just that, bamboo shades or bamboo curtains. But in the years leading up to the turn of the 20th century and in the decade just after, the more exotic term, sidarris, was preferred. As one article put it, it sounded foreign, and that was the cachet.

The demand for these bamboo shades reflected the state of American consumerism in that era. Back at the end of the 19th century household goods and furnishings coming from the Orient were in high demand. The Japanese Pavilion at the World’s Fair in Chicago was drawing praise, and before that, the country’s presence at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia captivated the attention of visitors and critics alike. As one account puts it, after that, “America went Japan-crazy.” Everyone, it seemed, wanted one or another piece of Japan in their homes.

The marketing of the bamboo blinds picked up on this fascination, and also drew upon another cultural trend, the open air movement which extolled the virtues of fresh air and being outside. The 1894 article from *The Daily British Whig* framed its recommendation of large verandas as an indication of the cultural advancement shown in the appreciation of the charm of outdoor living. Described as “open air parlors, outdoor verandas were the latest craze in home living. That craze had staying power, as seen in a 1907 article in *American Homes and Gardens* on the summer veranda, “protected from the sun by striped awnings or grass or bamboo curtains, and made comfortable with easy chairs, tables, rugs, and cushions, it has become a most important feature of the American summer home.”

Most of the notices and advertisements for sidarris described them as “Oriental” or “Eastern,” suggesting their direct importation from Japan. However, the 1893 article in the *Carpet & Upholstery Trade Review*, reprinted and summarized in several other publications, sought to revise that impression. The concept and design may well have originated in Asia, but their manufacture did not. The factory owner interviewed for the article noted that the screens might well have the appearance of the fine workmanship associated with Japan, but “the patient Japanese workmen who make these screens are usually good American citizens, and all the foreign look is manufactured to order and by machinery. It is not in Tokio or Yokohama that the bamboo curtains are made, but in New York or Brooklyn.”

He emphasized that while bamboo was a genuine product of the tropics, the manufacturing was all done on one side or another of the East River in New York, going on to claim that nearly every large city in America had at least one factory producing bamboo goods, citing factories in Philadelphia, St. Louis and San Francisco, in addition to those in New York. The key to the manufacture was not labor, but rather the use of machinery.



Advertisement from the June 21, 1892 issue of *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*

An article in the 1893 *Scientific American Supplement* (August 5) quoting the same factory owner went into some detail as to how the blinds were made:

The only secret in our business is the use of steam, and that is no secret at all. Hard as bamboo is, when steamed it is as pliable as putty, and may be bent into any desired shape. We put the stalks [poles] into long steam boxes, and steam them until they are almost pulp. While in this state the crooked ones are straightened, and the various articles are made. They are then dried and become as hard and substantial as they were before. We have large rooms expressly for the drying of finished articles with artificial heat.

The bamboo is then run through a splitter, a machine which cuts ten, twenty, perhaps fifty strips or even a hundred from each pole, depending on its diameter and the thickness desired. These strips are then taken up by the binders, the cords which hold them together in the curtain. The factory owner, not identified by name, stated that someone looking closely at a bamboo shade could discern the work of the equipment by seeing how the nodes in a dozen strips were exactly parallel. He emphasized the importance of this product, claiming that the “bamboo curtain was the first popular use to which bamboo has been put” in the U.S.

In addition to the manufacture of sidarris, the operation made numerous other items, including screens, fretwork, baskets and hampers, fancy boxes, parasols, chairs, stools, flower stands, settees, hat racks, tables, cabinets, brackets, easels, portieres, scrolls, and fancy woodwork, about \$800,000 worth of bamboo each year. In today’s dollars that would be 28 to 30 million.



A welcome spot on a hot day

The verandah fitted with Komi Green Painted Porch Curtains offers a cheerful welcome to summer-day visitors. It adds to the house a shady, out-door room in which to entertain your friends.

Komi Green Painted Porch Curtains

will stand all kinds of weather and will not fade. They are made of tough bamboo and fitted with galvanized blocks and cotton rope. Ask your dealer to show you Komi Porch Curtains—they cost so little and mean so much in comfort that no home should be without them. If your dealer doesn't handle them, write to us.

R. H. COMEY CO., Camden, N. J.
2440-2448 Washburn Ave., Chicago

BRUNSWICK REFRIGERATING CO., N



Dining in the open air

is one of the pleasures that may be yours when you equip your verandah with

Komi Green Painted Porch Curtains

They give complete privacy to your verandah—let in all the pleasant breezes, but keep out prying eyes and the hot sun. They will add a pleasant living room to your house and give all the good of your verandah.

Komi Curtains are made of selected bamboo that is tough enough to stand all kinds of wear. They are painted green not stained, that is why they never fade. They are fitted with non-rustable pulleys and American cotton rope.

Komi Green Painted Porch Curtains are made in all sizes. Ask your dealer to show you them, or write us for samples.

R. H. COMEY COMPANY, Camden, N. J.
2440-2448 Washburn Avenue, Chicago



One side of roof garden, including wall and roof framework

Top left: Advertisements from the May 1, 1922 issue of Country Life in America

Bottom left: Article from a 1905 issue of Good Housekeeping

The bamboo used to manufacture these goods was imported by “Chinese-American merchantmen.” From the description the factory owner gave, it seems the importers handled several species of bamboo coming from China, Japan, and India.

These items were all made by the same process: steaming, shaping, drying. The factory owner noted that once that process was complete, any decoration or desired fancy touches had to be put on with a hot iron. He explained that once bamboo is steamed and then dried, it becomes so hard that even with the best instruments, it is difficult to work. He observed that his operation did not put as many fancy touches on the bamboo items as compared with the highly ornamented work coming out of Asia, adding that when you see a plain piece, something strong and serviceable, it is almost sure to be of American manufacture. Fifty tables, a hundred, a thousand, they were all alike because they were machine-made, whereas foreign goods were made by hand. Seldom were two pieces precisely alike.

The popularity of bamboo furnishings lasted through the first decade of the 20th century. What happened to the factory in Brooklyn and the others this factory owner claimed were in operation across America is unknown. Times change, fashions change, business cycles change. More research awaits the answer to what happened to this hugely profitable operation manufacturing bamboo goods in America.

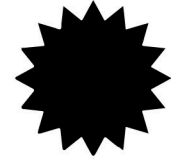
As for sidarris, the ubiquitous bamboo blinds, they are still around, though no longer known by that foreign-sounding name. Like everything else, their popularity comes and goes. It seems the fashion of bamboo porch shades lasted a bit longer than other bamboo furnishings in the early 20th century.

In 1912, a company out of New Jersey, R. H. Comey, was marketing a product called Komi, “green-painted porch curtains” strong enough to withstand all kinds of wear, made from selected bamboo, painted, and not stained and thus would never fade, fitted with non-rustable pulleys and American cotton rope. In that decade, verandas remained a popular feature of home design, even while bamboo was going out of fashion. At the same time the Komi shades were on the market, another company, Hough Shade Corporation out of Wisconsin, was crowding in on the demand for porch fittings. That company was marketing Vudor Porch Shades “made out of wide strips of light wood, firmly bound,” not to be confused with flimsy bamboo or imported screens. But, despite this attempt to lure consumers away from bamboo, the interest remained. Even today, you find windows, porches, and verandas fitted with bamboo blinds.



From the May 15, 1912 issue of Country Life in America

BAMBOO IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



Chusquea coleou

BY MARK SANDERS

While Asian bamboos get the lion's share of attention, Central and South American bamboos contain a wealth of diversity and beauty.

Species belonging to the genus *Chusquea* stand out among New World bamboos. According to the book *American Bamboos*, there are an estimated 200 species of *Chusquea*, making it the most diverse bamboo genus in the world.

Of these 200 or so species, *Chusquea coleou* is the most widely cultivated. If you see a *Chusquea* in a plant lover's garden, it is likely this one.

It's hard to mistake *Chusquea coleou* for any other bamboos, too. Its unique growth habit, in which dozens of tuft-like branches appear at the nodes of each culm, give *Chusquea coleou* an appearance resembling a bottle brush. These branches encircle each culm in a radial arrangement, resulting in an appearance that challenges traditional notions of what bamboo is supposed to look like.



Photo courtesy Bamboo Garden

Investigate *Chusquea coleou* a little deeper, and its story gets stranger. Unlike most bamboos, *Chusquea coleou*'s culms are solid – you won't likely be crafting flutes or xylophones with these – and even its color is distinct. Red, yellow and green colored culms are common.

Seemingly everything about *Chusquea coleou* makes it stand out. Besides the unpredictable coloration and distinct branching, mature culms may grow erect or they may appear to lean over when full grown. The leaves of some may be as much as three times larger than others. It may appear shrub-like in sunny environments and more stately in shadier spots. Although *Chusquea coleou* is a clumping (non-invasive) bamboo, it's referred to as an "open" clumper due to its widely spaced culms and rhizomes.

As an open clumper, *Chusquea coleou* fares better in the ground than it does in containers. Its rhizomes have long necks compared to more tightly packed rhizomes you'll find in the widely used *Bambusas* and *Fargesias*. With species within those genres, rhizome division is easy because they are so compressed. *Chusquea coleu*, by contrast, needs a lot of room. This is a notably difficult species to propagate via rhizome division, as a result.

In the wild, you can spot *Chusquea coleou* in the understories of Chilean and Argentinean forests. In American gardens, you'll find them mostly on the west coast, where the temperatures are warm enough to accommodate *Chusquea coleou*, but not nearly as humid as the equally warm Southeastern U.S.



Photo courtesy Bamboo Garden

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Bamboo art by Charissa Brock

