

## You Can Chew Bamboo Too

By Nick Pittman

Bamboo is a plant that pandas eat. If that is all you know about bamboo, then please read on! Few people know much about bamboo. It has many more uses than simply being a food for huge, cuddly bears.

Bamboo First of all, bamboo is old – very, very old. We know it existed around 30 – 40 million years ago. And it has not lived all this time simply because it's a lucky plant. Bamboo, besides being very old, is also very strong. With higher **tensile strength** (the greatest amount of stress an object can withstand before being pulled apart) than steel, bamboo is used for ladders, fences, and even bridges. In fact, there's a bridge in China that was built entirely from bamboo, without any sort of metal, even nails. It is 750 feet long and 4 feet wide!



Bamboo has many other uses as well, some stemming from its beauty. It is very elegant, and is used often for furniture, flutes, stilts and rugs. Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, used bamboo as the filament in his first light bulb in the year 1882. The Japanese alone have over 1000 varied uses for this plant that range from shelter for the homeless to making paper; it is also eaten by many animals (not just pandas). Any animal that eats grass, such as cows or goats, can eat bamboo as well, as bamboo is actually part of the grass family. The seeds are eaten by rodents, birds and even people.

Another amazing thing about bamboo is how fast it grows. Being the fastest growing plant in the entire world, bamboo can climb up to 18 inches in a single day. At its tallest, bamboo can reach up to 100 feet in height. That is taller than a ten-story building. The main habitat for bamboo is in the Eastern Hemisphere, and the biggest bamboo forests are in India and China. Bamboo is also often grown on plantations in Japan and Thailand.



You can even grow bamboo here in the United States. Maybe now that you know how fascinating bamboo is, you will want to go out and get some to grow in your house. Just make sure you clip it before it reaches the ceiling!