

MANUAL FOR HARVESTING AND DRYING BAMBOO

March 2025

ERIC
Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville, Tobago W.I.

Funded by:

NEW ZEALAND
HIGH COMMISSION

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Introduction

Welcome to this step-by-step guide on how to harvest and dry bamboo! Whether you're 16 or 50, this guide will help you get started with bamboo, even if you have no experience in craftsmanship. Bamboo is an amazing, sustainable material that can be used to create all sorts of products like furniture, crafts, and tools. By learning to harvest and dry bamboo the right way, you will ensure your projects are strong, durable, and eco-friendly.

Step 1: Understanding Bamboo

Before getting started, it's important to know a little about bamboo:

Fun Facts:

- **Fact 1:** Some species can grow up to a meter a day!
- **Fact 2:** Bamboo isn't a tree – it's actually a type of grass!
- **Fact 3:** Bamboo is one of the strongest natural materials – some species are even stronger than steel when it comes to tensile strength.
- **Fact 4:** Bamboo releases 35% more oxygen into the air than trees, but they need a lot of water and soil minerals to do so.
- **Fact 5:** Bamboo is considered an alien, invasive species in many regions of the world and pose a unique threat to specialised island-ecosystems, like the ones in the Caribbean.



Bamboo's root system

Bamboo has an extensive, fibrous root system known as **rhizomes**. These roots spread horizontally underground, anchoring the soil and forming a dense network.



- **Why is this important?** The rhizome root system helps prevent **soil erosion** by stabilizing the soil, especially on slopes and riverbanks. This makes bamboo an excellent plant for areas prone to flooding, landslides, or heavy rainfall and is often the reason bamboo was introduced to new ecosystems by humans.

Age matters:
For most projects, like construction grade materials, you need bamboo that is **3-5 years old**. Younger bamboo is too soft, and older bamboo can be brittle.

Harvest season

The best time to harvest bamboo is during the **dry season** (if you live in a tropical climate). This is when sugar levels in the bamboo are lower, reducing the risk of insect damage. Traditional methods advocate for harvesting bamboo during specific **lunar phases** to enhance its qualities, current scientific research does not provide definitive evidence to confirm these practices.

Tools You Will Need to Work with Bamboo

Task	Tool	Note
Cutting	Cutlass or handsaw	Easy to carry into the field
Personalising	Rotary tool	Offers a variety of options
Measuring	Measuring tape	to check bamboo length and diameter
Measuring	Marker or chalk	to mark where you will cut
Protection	Gloves	Avoiding splinters and provide increased grip
Protection	Safety goggles (to protect your eyes when cutting)	Useful for cutting and grinding purposes

Optional but useful tools:

- **Rope or straps** (to bundle bamboo)
- **Wholesaw Set or Stepdrill**

Step 2: Selecting the Right Bamboo

1. Look for mature bamboo that is **3-5 years old**.

   How can you tell?

   - Mature bamboo has a **dull, brownish color**.
   - Younger bamboo is often **shiny and green**.

2. Avoid bamboo with cracks, splits, or insect damage.
3. Choose straight, sturdy bamboo that fits the size you need for your project

Step 3: Harvesting the Bamboo

Follow these steps to harvest bamboo safely and correctly:

Drying bamboo without technical equipment is possible using traditional methods that rely on natural conditions. Here's a step-by-step guide:

1. Harvesting

- **Best Time**: Harvest bamboo during the dry season, ideally when the plant is mature (3-5 years old) and the sap content is lower.
- **Cut at the Right Stage**: Avoid harvesting during rainy months to reduce moisture content in the bamboo.

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2. Preparation

- **Clean the Bamboo**: Remove branches and leaves.
- **Treat with Water**: Optionally, soak bamboo poles in water (streams or ponds) for 2-4 weeks. This leaches out sugars and starches, reducing the risk of pest infestation and fungal attacks.

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3. Drying Techniques

- **Air Drying (Sun Drying)**
    1. Place the bamboo poles on raised supports to allow air circulation.
    2. Orient them horizontally to prevent warping.
    3. Protect them from direct rain and excessive sun exposure to prevent cracking.
    4. Turn them occasionally for even drying.
- **Standing Drying**
    1. Stand the poles vertically under a shaded area with good airflow.
    2. This minimizes warping as gravity keeps them straight.



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4. Time Required

- **Air Drying**:
    - Takes 6-12 weeks depending on the bamboo species, pole size, and climate.
    - Warm, dry, and breezy environments speed up the process.
- **Standing Drying**:
    - May take slightly longer (2-4 months) due to lower airflow compared to horizontal placement.

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5. Check for Readiness

- The bamboo is fully dried when:
    - It feels lighter in weight.
    - The colour changes to a uniform, duller shade.
    - Knocking the pole produces a crisp sound.

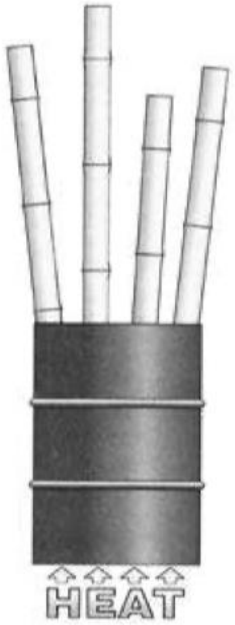
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6. Optional Post-Drying Treatment

- Apply a borax solution or lime paste to further protect dried bamboo from pests and mold, especially if it's to be used for construction or furniture. This will be explained in more detail in the "Butt Treatment Method"

By following these methods, you can dry bamboo naturally without technical equipment, though patience and regular monitoring are essential.

Alternatively, you can fall back onto some methods that have been proven by many generations across various countries and cultures.



Traditional Treatment
Traditional methods have been widely used by artisans and communities in Asia and other regions. Common techniques include smoking, soaking in salt water, or treating with natural chemicals.

a. Smoking
Smoking is one of the oldest and most used traditional methods. Bamboo poles are placed above a fireplace and exposed to smoke. This process lowers the moisture content of the bamboo, reduces the chances of fungal and insect attacks, and forms a protective tar layer on the surface. Smoking also helps prevent splitting.

b. Soaking in water
Newly cut bamboo materials are stored either in water ponds or in running water for 3-4 months to leach out starch. Lack of starch makes the bamboo less attractive to insects and other fungal attacks. One can also store bamboo materials in water basins but in this case, the water must be changed frequently.

c. Bucket Treatment Method
In this method, freshly cut bamboo poles are placed vertically, with their bottom ends submerged in a drum filled with preservative solutions such as boric acid and borax. The solution penetrates the bamboo vessels through capillary action and diffusion. The leaves on the pole facilitate this process by acting as a pump through transpiration. The treatment typically takes 1-2 weeks, depending on the bamboo's moisture content and length. Once treated, the poles are placed in an empty drum to drain any excess preservative. This method is suitable for treating small quantities of bamboo.

By using these preservation techniques, bamboo can be made more resistant to environmental and biological threats, ensuring longer-lasting and more durable products.

Step 4: Working with Bamboo

Working with bamboo is a straightforward and rewarding process.

1. First, carefully **cut** the bamboo to the desired size using a saw or machete, ensuring clean and precise edges.
2. Next, **sand** the surface to smooth out rough areas and create a polished finish, making it safe and pleasant to handle.
3. For a unique touch, add **personalization** by engraving names, patterns, or designs using a rotary tool.
4. Finally, apply an **optional coating**, such as a clear coat or natural oil, to protect the bamboo from moisture, insects, and wear, while enhancing its natural beauty.

These steps ensure a durable and visually appealing final product.



