

# Is patience a virtue?

By Marion Herndon

Newly installed in our home, the first with a swimming pool in the backyard, we decided we needed some privacy. There is a tall fence but the second story windows of the neighbor's homes loom, giving them a clear and unobstructed view into our pool area. As my husband and I approach our retired years we know neither one of us is winning any body-building or beauty contests. Is it privacy we crave or are we just being good folks by protecting our neighbors from the sight of two pudgy, middle-aged people floating about in our pool; me in a loudly floral bathing suit, huge straw hat, and sunglasses while fixated on a novel and my husband in swim trunks and sunglasses, sound asleep with an empty beer in the cup holder of his float? Accompanying this scenario: a healthy dose of country western music on the outdoor sound system.

After pondering what plantings we could install to provide a visual barrier, we settled on bamboo. A clumping, not a spreading, bamboo strategically planted to obstruct our neighbor's lines of vision would give us privacy. The variety we decided on was *Bambusa malingensis* or Seabreeze bamboo which has yellow-green stems and light green leaves. It might grow as tall as 35 feet and would bush out beautifully and yet not spread and become a nuisance. We enthusiastically sent away for three plants; one for each of three too-public areas in our yard.



The bamboo plants arrived in good shape and were subsequently planted in their respective locations. Now it was just a waiting game to see how fast the spindly plants would grow up and bush out. The first spring after planting we were disappointed to see that two of the plants had not "come back." With disappointment we dug them out and tossed them, planning to go back and dig up the third another day. We never got around to the third plant at all, and it was not until August that I noticed it happy and healthy and thriving. So *Bambusa malingensis* was a late bloomer. We lamented having tossed the other two.

That first summer the bamboo seemed to be getting its bearings. It was growing but it was definitely not growing at the rate we expected. The second spring, I knew to wait for it...wait for it...and voila, there it was leafing out and looking happy. That second summer it took off in terms of height (at least 8 feet) and bushed out a little, too.

Here we are and it's spring again. Our other plants are showing signs of life while the Seabreeze takes her own sweet time. The tallest naked culm now measures 12 feet 4 inches. It will prove out, however, that patience IS a virtue. I have every faith that our one remaining bamboo will eventually grow to meet our expectations as a visual barrier. Will we order two to replace those we prematurely gave up on that first spring? I believe so because while patience is a virtue, it has proven to be easier for us than for our neighbors. Eventually, they won't have to see the pudgy middle-aged couple floating in the pool, but they will still be subjected to the strains of country western music coming from our yard!