

Lifelong fascination with bamboo takes root

By **CRAIG REED**
For the Capital Press

GOLD BEACH, Ore. — When he was a high school student in Japan, Gib Cooper was impressed by the landscaping in that country and the significant role bamboo played in providing a clean, neat look.

So a few years later, in 1972 while in his mid-20s, Cooper started growing a few varieties of bamboo. Ever since, it's been a lifetime livelihood for Cooper who is now 65. He and his wife, Diane, have owned and operated Tradewinds Bamboo Nursery since 1986, first in Potter Valley in Northern California and then in Gold Beach in southwestern Oregon since 1992.

"I lived in The Philippines and Japan in my youth and I saw how important bamboo was and how useful it was in both those countries," Gib Cooper said, adding that he was a member of a military family. "Bamboo was an iconic part of the horticulture in Japan as well as day-to-day use."

Cooper liked the clean look of bamboo, an evergreen plant in the grass family. Giant bamboos are the largest members of that family.

He also noted that growing bamboo hadn't drawn any commercial interest in the U.S. When the American Bamboo Society was founded in 1980, Cooper was quick to become a member. In 1983, he partnered with a Japanese man and established Panda Products, a business that marketed bamboo seedlings. The partners started a 10-acre bamboo farm.

"Nobody else was growing bamboo in the U.S.," said Cooper who was a licensed landscape contractor and always had a nursery as part of

Tradewinds Bamboo Nursery

Owners: Gib and Diane Cooper

Where: 28446 Hunter Creek Loop, Gold Beach, Ore.

What: One acre of more than 200 varieties of bamboo, in 2- or 3-gallon pots or larger groups of plants

Business: Primarily mail order; appointments can be made to visit nursery

Information: bambodirect.com

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— Gib Cooper, co-owner of Tradewinds Bamboo Nursery

his landscaping business.

But the farm suffered a rodent problem.

"Gophers, moles and voles, they beat us," Cooper said. "The young seedlings were killed by the rodents."

The partnership dissolved in 1986. The Coopers then started Tradewinds. A few years later the Coopers began looking for a wetter, cooler climate than that of Mendocino County and subsequently they landed a mile south of Gold Beach.

"It's on the coast where it's never too hot and never too cold," Gib Cooper said. "And there were no rodents here."

It was also a good location because Cooper likes to surf and there are some good spots for that along the coast in that area.

The nursery grows more than 200 varieties of bamboo, in pots and in the ground, on about 1 acre. The plants range from 6-inch ground cover to timber groves 50 feet tall.

Cooper explained that there are 1,500 varieties of bamboo in the world. Only three are native to the U.S., but about 500 are native to Central and South America.

"I grow a good selection of native America species," he said.

Depending on the species, bamboo will run and spread over a large area if given time and the right conditions or it will grow in tight clumps. Tradewinds sells both, although Cooper said his focus has become more directed toward the clumping types.

"Everybody has a good reason to want to buy bamboo," Cooper said. "The most common is to grow a narrow strip between neighbors to block the view. People also buy it for craft purposes, and people from Japan and China miss having bamboo shoots to eat in the spring."

To help growers and customers learn about and conserve the native bamboo species, Cooper helped establish Bamboo of the Americas. He helped with that program from 1999 to 2014 and spent time as the executive director. He was also vice president of the American Bamboo Society for 6 years and was one of the founders of the Oregon Bamboo Association.

Because the bamboo nursery is around their house, the Coopers do business primarily by mail order. Appointments can be made to visit the nursery.



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Diane and Gib Cooper stand among the taller bamboo plants at their Tradewinds Bamboo Nursery near Gold Beach, Ore. The couple have been selling bamboo plants through Tradewinds since starting the business in 1986 in Potter Valley, Calif. The nursery has been in Gold Beach since 1992.

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