

Oxytenanthera abyssinica

Gramineae

Indigenous

English: Wild bamboo, lowland bamboo**Nyanja:** Nthele, sungwi**Senga:** Swaswe, sasu**Tumbuka:** Saswe

Ecology: All bamboos belong to a subgroup of the huge grass family. Among the 250 species, there are 43 in Africa and 40 of these grow only in Madagascar. Most bamboo grow in the humid forests of South-East Asia where they are very important for rural people. They are perennials with woody stems, tough and hollow, growing up from swollen underground stems (rhizomes). Lowland bamboo ranges from Ethiopia, Uganda to Zimbabwe and grows throughout Zambia along river banks, on termite mounds and in dambos, particularly in the Copperbelt, 500–2,100 m. It is the most hardy of the three African species, often found on very poor soils, e.g. in Tanzania.

Uses: Poles (building, furniture, scaffolding), **ornamental**, **fences**, soil conservation, **basketry** (split stems).

Description: A tall grass to 7 m, in dense clumps, unusual as the stems are solid; reaching 10 cm diameter at the base. Stems arch over. **LEAVES:** there are **irritating dark brown hairs** on the leaf sheath. Leaves are blue-green, **base rounded, the tip long and spiny**, usually 15 cm long x 2.5 cm but up to 25 cm. **FLOWERS** and **FRUIT:** spikelets narrowed, pointed, 2.5 cm in **clusters** 6 cm across. Flowering takes place about every 7 years. Then the clumps die down but shoot one year later from the rhizomes.

Propagation: Rhizomes.

Seed: Seed is rare; cuttings, suckers.

treatment: –

storage: –

Management: Needs to be controlled by cutting.

Remarks: The yellow-stemmed bamboo commonly grown in and around Chipata belongs to another genus, *Bambusa vulgaris*. In most places bamboos are in demand for building purposes. Fences are susceptible to damage by termites and borers. It survives fires in its natural habitat. In Eastern Province, it is popular for basketry. The grain has been used as famine food.

