

***Arundinaria alpina***

## Poaceae (Gramineae)

**Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Mountain bamboo; **Kamba:** Muangi; **Kikuyu:** Murangi; **Kipsigis:** Terga, Tegaat; **Luo:** Mwodi; **Maasai:** Oldiani; **Marakwet:** Terga, Tegaat; **Nandi:** Togat; **Ogiek:** Togat; **Sabaot:** Tegendet; **Swahili:** Mwanzi; **Taita:** Mrangi.

**DESCRIPTION:** A large hollow-stemmed grass, usually 6–8 m but can reach 12–25 m. **STEMS (culms):** Smooth, woody, hollow, yellow-green to brown, growing from swollen underground stems (rhizomes). **Whorls of thin branches grow at the thickened upper nodes.** Stems can reach 7–10 cm in diameter. **LEAVES:** Grow from branchlet nodes, pale green, up to 20 cm long and 1 cm wide, the tip long and thin; rough to the touch because of short hairs. Leaves appear from a large yellow leaf sheath to 50 cm long, with purple hairs. **FLOWERS:** Rarely seen, in heads 10–20 cm long. After flowering the plant dies back.

**ECOLOGY:** The species forms the bamboo zone in moist highlands at 2,400–3,000 m. It grows in irregular patches from 2,150 m. Found in the Timboroa Plateau and on Mts Kenya and Elgon and on Loita Hills and the Mau Range. The species has an upper limit of about 3,360 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–II.

**USES:** Furniture, poles, construction, utensils, food (shoots), fodder, fencing, ornamental, soil conservation, basketry.

**PROPAGATION:** Rhizomes, natural regeneration, seedlings (possible, but rather rare). Seed of *A. alpina* watered daily will germinate readily. Transfer seedlings to boxes when 2.5 cm high. Plant out 8–12 months later, above 2,500 m. Offsets from 1-year old culms can also be planted out and will develop quicker than seedlings.

**SEED:** Flowers at long intervals after which it dies.

**treatment:** Not required.

**storage:** Sow as soon as collected.

**MANAGEMENT:** Very fast growing in optimal conditions; needs to be controlled.

**REMARKS:** The Maasai make snuff containers from the stems. The life of a culm is about 10–15 years. The life cycle on the Aberdare Range is believed to be more than 40 years. Plants die down after flowers and seeds are formed. All bamboos belong to the grass family. Most species grow in the humid forests of South East Asia where they are of great importance to rural people. Of 1,250 species, 43 are found in Africa and most of these grow only in Madagascar.

The East African species are *Oxytenanthera abyssinica*, *Oreobambos buchwaldii*, and the mountain bamboo, *A. alpina*. Both the mountain bamboo and *O. buchwaldii* have been recorded in Kenya. The exotic *Bambusa vulgaris* (Golden bamboo) was introduced as an ornamental. Other exotic species are being grown too.

*Bambusa vulgaris* is a common ornamental in towns and is seen in large clumps. The tall stems (culms) reach 15 m and are yellow streaked with green. Bamboos are susceptible to termites and borers (*A. alpina*, in particular).

**FURTHER READING:** Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.

