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How can homebuyers be protected from the risks posed by bamboo?



Bamboo growing through a residential lawn

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Unlike with Japanese knotweed, there is no legal obligation for a seller or surveyor to flag the presence of bamboo on a property to potential buyers. Yet homeowners who unwittingly inherit it automatically become responsible for remedying the problem if there's a risk of damage or encroachment.

In this edition of Beacon, we explore the current framework for highlighting invasive bamboo during property transactions, and how surveyors and conveyancers can better protect their clients.

Bamboo awareness is growing – but slowly

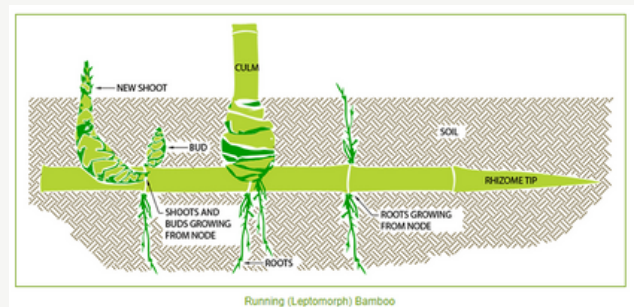
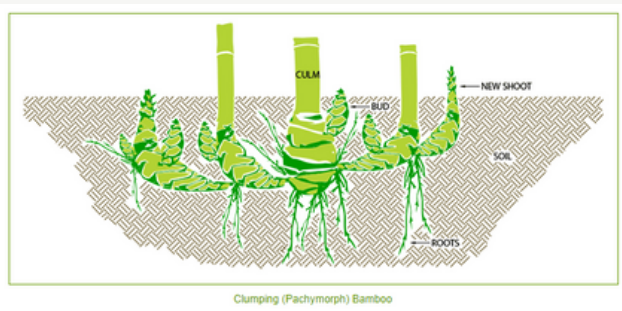
A YouGov survey commissioned by Environet in March this year showed that 71% of respondents weren't aware that bamboo could cause physical damage to properties, but media interest in bamboo as a problem for homeowners is growing.

A long read on the topic in [The Guardian](#) in June, and subsequent news reports on ITV News and BBC Breakfast have helped raise awareness.

We are certainly seeing strong growth in demand for our bamboo removal services, which has increased 170% since 2020 and now accounts for 42% of our overall invasive plant work.



Is every bamboo plant a problem? *The short answer is no.*



Images - Bamboo Plants and Anatomy.

Bamboo varieties falling into the 'clumping' category are much slower to spread and, while there's always an element of risk, they typically remain confined to one area of the garden.

'Running' varieties of bamboo are far more problematic. Once established, they send out long, lateral runners which can travel several metres from the parent plant, emerging in new locations – often in adjacent properties.

Telltale signs of spread

Identifying the particular variety of bamboo is helpful when determining its propensity to spread, but with over 300 varieties found in the UK, it isn't always possible.

A surveyor assessing a property where bamboo is present should consider the size, maturity and location of the plant, and secondly, look for telltale signs of spread, such as new shoots more than 30cm from the main clump or growth in a linear or non-uniform pattern, rather than a tight ball.



Protections for buyers

There is no obligation for a seller to declare bamboo, as there is for knotweed, meaning there's no obvious legal recourse against a seller if it's discovered post-sale.

A buyer's best defence is their surveyor, but again, unlike for knotweed, they aren't legally obligated to flag bamboo on a property survey. However, many are rightly opting to do so where there is evidence it's spreading or could potentially cause damage or give to rise an encroachment-related legal case from a neighbour, which might constitute a defect.

Whilst this is encouraging, in our view, too few surveyors are flagging bamboo and as public awareness grows, we may see a rise in legal cases against surveyors, where a customer has unwittingly inherited significant cost and inconvenience from an invasive bamboo problem.



Some varieties of bamboo grow several metres tall



Removal of bamboo often requires machinery

"Nobody wants to inherit a stressful and expensive issue when they buy a property, but this is frequently happening with bamboo as there is no legal framework to protect buyers, as there is for Japanese knotweed.

We've seen cases where clients have moved into their new home and they've barely unpacked before their new neighbour has knocked on the door asking what they're going to do about the bamboo which is spreading onto their property.

In our view, mature bamboo which is planted directly into the ground should be flagged on a property survey, recommending the buyer undertake further investigations to find out whether it's spreading and what it would cost to remove. In addition to potential damage to their own property and garden, buyers need to consider the risk of a legal case from a neighbour if the bamboo encroaches."

**Emily Grant,
Director of Operations**

Could RICS go further?

We wouldn't go as far as to say there should be a legal requirement for sellers to declare bamboo, but we believe there should be a greater onus on surveyors to alert their clients to the potential risk. In such cases official guidance relating to bamboo would be extremely helpful, highlighting the range of risks in a traffic light system, considering the size and maturity of the infestation, how close it is to the property or boundary, and any visible evidence of spread.

RED	AMBER	GREEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runners or shoots visible > 0.5m from main stand • Visible encroachment in adjoining property • Visible damage • Variety - is it a highly invasive variety? • Large area affected • Immediate Proximity to built structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present on boundary, even if it haven't yet encroached • Close to built structures • Running variety of bamboo • Multiple areas of bamboo present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bamboo is in a secure pot lined with bamboo-proof membrane • Bamboo is a clumping variety with no evidence of spread
<p>Recommendation: A professional bamboo survey should be carried out</p>	<p>Recommendation: An advisory note included in survey report; possibly a bamboo survey</p>	<p>Recommendation: No further action required</p>

Case study: *Leah Jones - Plymouth*

When Leah Jones and her family moved into their terraced home in Plymouth they liked the Mediterranean feel of the rear garden, which had bamboo growing on one side. A survey on the property had not mentioned the bamboo and the family were unaware of the risks, until a family member mentioned he had read it could be invasive.

On further investigation, they realised the bamboo had in fact spread across the width of the garden, beneath the patio and artificial lawn, with new shoots emerging four metres away on the opposite side. A bamboo survey revealed that the entire back garden was crisscrossed with bamboo rhizome, with runners visible against the boundary wall adjoining the neighbouring property. As a result, the entire back garden has been excavated, causing major disruption and incurring the family significant cost, but they were concerned about the risk of damage to their home, a legal case if it spread next door, and having issues selling the property in the future.



Leah Jones' garden

"Knowing what I know now, I wouldn't buy a property with bamboo in the garden. I would insist that the seller had it removed first. I hope by raising awareness we can prevent this happening to other homebuyers who may have no idea what they're taking on."

Leah Jones

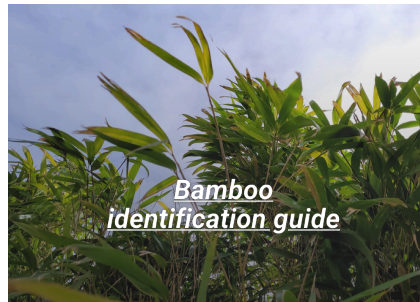
Conclusion

Considering the purpose of a property survey is to alert a homebuyer to any issue that may impact their decision to buy the property, or the price they are willing to pay for it, highlighting the presence of a potentially highly invasive plant is both fair and appropriate.

Where bamboo is present and there are signs it's spreading, a specialist bamboo survey can be recommended at a cost of £250+VAT, enabling buyers to make an informed decision about whether to go ahead, and if so, whether to renegotiate the price to reflect the cost of treatment.



Further information



About the author



Emily Grant, Director of Operations

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Emily has 20 years of Environmental consultancy experience, with the last decade focused entirely on invasive plants. As Director of Operations, she oversees governance and compliance, and also runs the Sales & Marketing department.

As a recognised expert in invasive plants, Emily hosts numerous seminars and webinars, sharing knowledge with industry professionals and clients. Furthermore, Emily is regularly called upon by the press to provide expert commentary, helping raise awareness about the management of invasive plant species.



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