

THE FOUNTAIN BAMBOO – FARGESIA NITIDA

CHRIS STAPLETON

Following the initiation of flowering of this important bamboo, *Fargesia nitida*, the question of what exactly to call it has now to be tackled seriously. In an article in Newsletter No 22 (July 1995) I pointed out the similarity of its flowers to those of *Fargesia spathacea*, suggesting that they might well represent the same species. In the past such a discovery would have led to a most unpopular name change. However, the rules of Botanical Nomenclature have just changed to allow us to keep on using such a well established specific name as *nitida*, even if it is shown to be the same as a species described earlier. The later name, such as *nitida* could now be formally conserved against an earlier, but unused name for the same species, such as *spathacea*.

I had hoped that my article would bring in a response, and those who wrote to me were unanimous in pointing out that the leaves of *F. nitida* and *F. spathacea* were very different despite the similarities in the flowers. We only have one collection of *Fargesia spathacea*, and it is not in cultivation. It has well developed leaf sheath auricles and stout scabrous oral setae, while *F. nitida* has no auricles and slender smooth oral setae, more like a continuation of the cilia on the leaf sheath edge. If this difference is considered sufficient for the two to be different species, then this would allow us to keep on using the name *nitida* anyway. If more collections of these bamboos are made in China we might get a better picture of variation within the species and where their boundaries should be drawn. Until then we should definitely consider them to be two different species, as the new rules will allow us to conserve the name *nitida* if we do decide later that they really are varieties of the same species.

Therefore I am happy to say there is absolutely no need for anyone to change the name *F. nitida* and we can keep on using this name for our important and widely planted species, known in the United States as the Fountain Bamboo.