# Lemongrass

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## CULTURE AT A GLANCE

**pH:** 5.0 – 5.8
**Planting Depth**: 4
**Spacing:** 1'- 2'
**Propagation:** Divison
**Caution:** Leaf edges can be sharp
**Light:** Full sun to light shade
**Water:** Moderate
**Fertilizer:** Moderate
**Temperature/Atmosphere:** Warm/Tropical

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) is a perennial grass in the tropical regions. It has long, narrow, fragrant leaves with a leafy stalk and grows in clumps can reach 3 feet or more in height and diameter. Lemongrass is known to live for a long time. As a perennial, once you plant it, you can enjoy it for years to come. It is one of the easiest herbs to grow on Guam. One sprig planted will produce a clump of many sprigs for planting or harvesting in just a few months.

### Climate

Lemongrass grows best in warm or tropical regions. Full sunlight is preferred; however, lemongrass can tolerate light shade. Once established it is very low maintenance in our climate.

### Culture

While lemongrass is very hardy and does well in a wide variety of soil conditions it can also be grown in a container. It likes well drained soils free of pathogens. As the plants age, it is good to remove old clumps to allow new shoots to grow. Pruning old and dead leaves promotes new leaf growth.

Lemongrass is one of many herbs and vegetables that grow well in containers and makes an excellent patio plant. Some advantages and cautions of lemon grass production in containers include:

- Container production allows for high densities of plants in small areas.
- Individuals with limited space or physical limitations can grow lemon grass in containers near their kitchen and at accessible heights on stands/tables.
- Lemon grass does well in pots with adequate drainage but requires more moisture than if planted in the ground. Heat and wind can dry the soil in pots faster in outdoor environments. Container grown plants require frequent watering.
- Large plants will become root-bound and will need root pruning. This is a great time to divide the lemon grass clump into many new plants.

### Uses

**Food:** Good source of vitamin A, the leaves can be used for tea, the lower portion of the stem is used in curries and Asian cooking.

**Mulch:** Cut continuously for mulch during the wet months; as a companion plant it has pest repellent properties.

**Erosion Control:** Plant on the contour on steep banks to control erosion, as a filter strip it should be planted 4" – 6" apart.

**Edging:** Can be used as a barrier around vegetable gardens, it is attractive as a yard and landscape ornamental.

## Propagation

Propagation is primarily by division. Detach one or more slips from the clump with rhizome (root) material from the parent plant. Trim leaf material to about 10 inches from the root. Clean the root materials to just a short portion of the rhizome. Plant the slips 4 to 6 inches deep in the ground about 1 foot apart, or in a pot with good compost or potting soil. Keep the soil moist for a few weeks after planting. Lemongrass can be propagated by seed, but this is not common.

## Pest Management

On Guam, lemongrass is hardy crop that is resistant to most pests and diseases.

## Harvest and Post-Harvest

In about 6 to 9 months from planting the clump will have developed many stalks. At this point frequent harvest stimulates new growth. For culinary use, plants at least 12 inches high with ½ inch stems are desired. Pull the stalk up firmly close to the root end and cut it off. It is recommended to pick the stalk right before use.

***Storage:*** Store fresh lemon grass in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed plastic bag for up to 3 weeks.

**Freeze:** Store in freezer bags for about 6 months without any flavor loss.

## Culinary

Lemon grass is pungent herb used in small amounts. The entire stalk, rhizome and leaves can be used in many recipes. It is used in Caribbean, Thai, Vietnamese, and other Asian culinary traditions. Lemongrass can be used in teas, nonalcoholic beverages, soups, roasted meats/seafood, baked goods and confections

## For further information

Contact the College of Natural & Applied Sciences, Extension and Outreach at 735-2080 for help or more information. Additional publications can be found on our website at: uog.edu/extension/publications.

## References

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