



Lemongrass

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Agriculture & Natural Resources Program

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Introduction

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) is a perennial grass that grows in tropical regions. It has long, narrow, fragrant leaves with a leafy stalk and grows in clumps able to reach 3 feet or more in height and diameter.

Lemongrass is known to live for a long time. As a perennial, once it is planted, it can be enjoyed for years to come. It is one of the easiest herbs to grow in Guam. In just a few months, one planted sprig will produce a clump of many sprigs for planting or harvesting.

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 Guam's 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. In older plants it is recommended 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 grows well in containers (Figure 1) and makes an excellent patio plant. Some advantages of herb and vegetable production in containers and some cautions include:

- Container production allows for high densities of plants in small areas.
- Individuals with limited space or physical limitations can grow lemongrass in containers near their kitchen.
- Lemongrass does well in pots with adequate drainage but requires more moisture than if planted in the ground.

CULTURE AT A GLANCE

pH: 5.0-5.8

Planting Depth: 4 inches

Spacing: 1-2 feet

Propagation: Division (Caution: Leaf edges can be sharp)

Light: Full sun to light shade

Water: Moderate

Fertilizer: Moderate

Temperature/Atmosphere: Warm/Tropical



Figure 1.

Lemongrass is one of many herbs and vegetables that grows well in containers.

- Heat and wind can dry the soil in pots faster in outdoor environments. Container-grown plants require frequent watering.
- Large plants can become root-bound and will need root pruning. This is a great time to divide the plant into many new plants.

Uses

- **Food:** Lemongrass is a good source of vitamin A. Use the leaves in tea and the stem bases in curries and Asian cooking.
- **Mulch:** During the wet months, lemongrass can be cut continuously for mulch. It also has pest-repellent properties and can be used as a companion plant.
- **Erosion control:** Use lemongrass for erosion control by planting it on the contour on steep banks as a filter strip (Figure 2). It should be planted 4–6 inches apart.
- **Edging:** Lemongrass is attractive as a yard and landscape ornamental. Use it as a barrier around vegetable gardens.

Propagation

Propagating lemongrass is primarily done by division. Detach one or more slips from the clump with rhizome (root) material from the parent plant. Trim the leaf material to about 10 inches from the root. Clean the root materials to just a short portion of the rhizome (Figure 3). 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

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

Harvest and post-harvest

In about six to nine 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 tall with half-inch stems are desirable. Pull the



Figure 3.
Lemongrass sprigs for planting or eating.
Source: *GardeningKnowHow.com*

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 lemongrass in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed plastic bag for up to three weeks. It can also be stored in freezer bags for about six months without any flavor loss.

Culinary use

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



Figure 2.
Lemongrass used as a filter strip in contour farming.

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