Lemon Grass

Cymbopogon citratus



Height: Up to 1m

Suitable for: Sunny position. Pot cultivation, indoors in winter

Summary: Lemon grass is a tropical herb widely used in oriental cooking and with many other uses. This plant produces an arching fountain of foliage with the edible part as a swollen base to each stem. As it is a native of a hot climate it is best grown in a large container and brought indoors before it gets cold in winter where it makes an attractive conservatory plant.

More information:

Lemon grass is a great herb to grow in a large container.

It originates from tropical areas and cannot withstand the cold of our winters, so grow it in an attractive pot which can be brought into the house as a foliage houseplant in the colder months.

It will thrive in a moist rich compost with plenty of water several times each week, but never leave the base of the pot sitting in a pool of water. A sunny spot is ideal, preferably at least 6 hours each day of bright light.

The base of each group of leaves develops a fat swollen stalk. As the plant grows and develops it is made up of an increasing number of these individual stalks, which is the part which is harvested once the plant is big enough.

Once the plant is at least 40 cm tall with quite a few stalks at the base, you can harvest entire stalks for use in the kitchen. Use a sharp knife to sever off the whole stalk at soil level, don't break them off or you might damage the rest of the plant. Take the outer stalks first, they should be at least 1.5 cm thick. The swollen bottom bulb is the part to cook with. You may need to peel off a few tough outer leaves first. Unused stalks can be wrapped in damp kitchen paper and then stored in a plastic bag in the fridge for several days.

The green foliage can be chopped and infused as a refreshing herb tea, or — as advised by one our customers — the chopped leaves can be infused along with standard tea in the teapot and served black with a slice of lemon.

The citrus flavour of the leaves can be quite strong, especially after the plants have spent the summer outside in full sunlight, so do add sparingly until you find the strength of flavour which you like.

Chopped lemon grass stalks are widely used in Asian cuisine — in soups and curries with poultry, fish, seafood and beef. Recipes abound in contemporary cook books, always great to experiment with. In addition lemon grass adds zing and flavour to lots of drinks. A long summer drink to serve in a jug for friends is:

Tropical lemon grass and lime rum punch

Makes 4 servings

- 75 g sugar
- 2 lemon grass. stalks — chopped
- A small handful of lemon grass foliage — roughly chopped
- The juice from 3 limes
- 200 ml golden rum
- Soda water and lime wedges to serve

Put the sugar, lemon grass stalks and foliage in a small pan with 200 ml water. Warm gently and stir until the sugar dissolves. Leave to cool and infuse for at least two hours in the fridge, or it can be left overnight.

When you are ready to serve, strain the lemon grass syrup into a large jug and add the lime juice and rum. Top up with an equal volume of chilled soda water.

Add 3 or 4 ice cubes and a couple of lime wedges to each glass — give the lime a gentle squeeze as you

drop it in. Top up with the punch from the jug.

You can decorate with extra lemon grass stalks if you have them or a few feathery fronds of lemon grass foliage.

The oils in lemon grass have lots of homeopathic uses and is used extensively in Ayurvedic medicine. It is used as a medicinal herb in the Indian subcontinent, it has antifungal properties, helps to prevent and alleviate the symptoms of coughs and colds, and repels some insects such as mosquitoes.