

# Lemongrass Herb Profile

## Also known as

Cymbopogon citratus.

## Introduction

With its lemony scent and hint of rose aroma, lemongrass is an essential ingredient in Thai and Indonesian cooking. Lemongrass grows wild in Indonesia, Indochina, and tropical Australia, and has been cultivated in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka as a culinary herb and in India as a medicinal herb for thousands of years. It was considered by Paracelsus to be a cure-all and was his favorite and most revered herb. Traditional Chinese medicine has used it to relieve headaches and abdominal pain. Traditional Brazilian medicine makes great use of lemongrass as a sedative, an analgesic, and to relieve spasms and muscle cramps.

## Constituents

The essential oil of lemongrass (0.2 to 0.5%, "West Indian lemongrass oil") consists mainly of citral. The herb also contains myrcene, nerol, limonene, linalool and beta-caryophyllene; the compounds make the essential oil subject to "curdling" when exposed to the air.

## Parts Used

The lower portion of the stalk.

## Typical Preparations

Universally used within tea blends for its flavor and aroma. Rarely seen in encapsulations or extracts, but equally as effective. Sliced fresh lemongrass, or ground powder (1 teaspoon of lemongrass powder equals one stalk of fresh lemongrass)

## Summary

As a medicinal herb, lemongrass is mildly diuretic and a stimulant tonic. The herb promotes digestion of fats, and in Ayurvedic medicine a preparation of lemongrass with pepper has been used for relief of menstrual troubles and nausea. The herb stimulates perspiration, cooling the body in summer and lowering fevers any time of year. Lemongrass is well known as a mild insect repellent (citronella) and the essential oil is used in perfumery. A study in 1988 found significant antimicrobial activity in fighting several human pathogens such as E.coli and staphylococcus aureus. It has also been used externally for treatment of lice, ringworm, and scabies.

## **Precautions**

Take care to store lemon grass away from other foods and spices, as they make pick up its aroma. Soak dried whole lemon grass for two hours in warm water before using in cooking. It medicinal application in excessive doses should be avoided while pregnant.