

Cymbopogon citratus

[Synonyms : *Andropogon ceriferus*, *Andropogon citratus*, *Andropogon citriodorum*,
Andropogon nardus var. *ceriferus*, *Andropogon roxburghii*, *Andropogon schoenanthus*]

LEMONGRASS (English, French, German, Italian) is a perennial grass. Native to the subtropics in south-eastern Asia, southern India and Sri Lanka, it has brown flower spikelets. It is also known as *Bhustrina* (Sanskrit), *Chakai* (Thai), *Citroengras* (Dutch), *Citronellgras* (German), *Citron gras* (German), *Citrongräs* (Swedish), Citronella grass, Citronnella, *Citronnelle* (French), *Erba di limone* (Italian), *Erva-cidreira* (Portuguese), Fever grass, *Gandhabena* (Bengali), *Gandhatrina* (Hindi), *Herbe citron* (French), *Khawi* (Hindi, Punjabi), *Lemongras* (German), *Limonaria* (Argentinian, Spanish), *Malojillo* (Spanish), Melissa grass, *Nimmagaddi* (Telugu), *Ning meng cao* (Chinese), Oil plant, *Pasto cedrón* (Argentinian, Spanish), *Pasto-limón* (Argentinian, Spanish), *Pirhe ghaans* (Nepalese), *Remon gurasu* (Japanese), *Remonsou* (Japanese), *Sả* (Vietnamese), *Sayra* (Singhalese), *Sera* (Sinhalese), *Serai* (Malay), *Serai makan* (Malay), *Sere* (Javanese), *Sereh* (Indonesian, Malay, Singhalese, Sundanese), *Sereh makan* (Indonesian, Malay), *Sitronellaheinä* (Finnish), *Sitwonnèl* (Creole), Squinant, Sweet rush, *Ta khrai* (Thai), *Tanglád* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Te de limon* (Honduran, Spanish), *Vasana-pillu* (Malayalam, Tamil), *Verveine des Indes* (French), West Indian lemongrass, *Westindisches Lemongras* (German), *Xiang mao* (Chinese), *Xiang mao cao* (Chinese), *Zacate-dete* (Spanish), *Zacate-limón* (El Salvadorean, Spanish), and *Zitronengras* (German).

The more tender lower parts of stalks (less tough outer sheaths) are harvested for food. The leaves yield an oil often called West Indian lemongrass oil.

Warning – prolonged handling can cause dermatitis and extreme sensitivity to sunlight.

Citratus is derived from the genus name *Citrus* meaning ‘citrus-like’.

This grass has been used for centuries in Asia as a food flavouring, particularly for fish. Some reports suggest that the Philippines were exporting distilled lemon grass from at least the 17th Century.

In the West Indies an infusion of the grass has been used as a treatment for chills and colds, and it has been added to baths taken as an antidote for poisoning. While in Sri Lanka the grass stalks can be found in the markets where they are sold for flavouring hotly-spiced dishes and pickles.

In Malaysia, as well as a flavouring for food, the grass plays a role in sorcery. It was believed to have protective qualities and would sometimes be planted at the corners of a rice field to safeguard the crop.

Several varieties are cultivated in different parts of the sub-tropics and are known individually for their slightly varying qualities. The different essences extracted include Ceylon citronella oil, Java citronella oil and yet another which comes from an Indian lemongrass. Most of them are used by the perfumery industry, and some are used as ingredients in cosmetics and flavouring in beverages.

As its root system is dense lemongrass is often grown to counter soil erosion.

Today commercially lemongrass provides a flavouring for the food industry eg. baked products and confectionery and it offers a violet scent in drinks. Lemongrass is used in cosmetics,

perfumes and toiletries such as soap. In addition it can be used in insect repellents ie. for flies, fleas and mosquitos.

Medicinally, it is used today in Brazil and the Caribbean. Chinese medicine employs it for treating colds, headaches and stomach and rheumatic pains. India turns to lemongrass as a remedy for catarrh, bruises and ringworm. In Africa the leaves are used to make a tea that is either drunk or added to bath water to ease fever