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LEMON GRASS (*Cymbopogon citratus*)

You have received dormant, bare-root plants. It is normal for them to appear pale and dry, with few to no visible roots — with proper care, they will grow. If the plants arrive before you are ready to transplant them, or weather prohibits transplanting, place them in a cool, 40°F/4°C, location for up to 48 hours, and keep the plants damp. If you will not be able to transplant outside for several days or longer, you can plant the lemon grass in small containers and place them in a greenhouse or sunny window until you are ready to move them outside.

Lemon grass is a perennial herb with a light lemon scent and flavor. Native to India, lemon grass is a common ingredient in Southeast Asian cuisine, and is gaining in popularity as a culinary herb and ornamental garden plant in the United States. The essential oil of lemon grass is used in aromatherapy, cosmetics, and natural insect repellants.

LIFE CYCLE: Tender perennial. Hardy in Zones 9–13. Grow as an annual in colder zones, or overwinter the plants indoors.

LIGHT/SOIL/WATER REQUIREMENTS: Lemon grass prefers full sun and warm (60–85°F/15–29°C), humid growing conditions, with nitrogen-rich soil that has a pH of 5.5–7.5. Avoid heavy or clay soil types. Lemon grass grows best in areas with 24–30 inches of rainfall per year, so frequent irrigation may be needed in drier climates.

CULTURE: Plant the lemon grass as soon as possible after arrival, but avoid planting until all chances of frost are gone.

Transplanting to the field: Remove any dead or loose leaves from the bottom of the stalk. Plant ½ inch deep in prepared soil — too deep will cause the plant to rot. Space plants 18–36 inches apart in rows 3–5 feet apart. Space the plants closer together if you will be growing them as an annual.

Transplanting to pots: Container planting is a good option for northern growers who may want to overwinter the plants inside. Remove any dead or loose leaves from the bottom of the stalk. Plant ½ inch deep in prepared soil — too deep will cause the plant to rot. To transplant into pots for resale, use one 2½-inch or 4-inch pot per plant. If growing in a warm (85°F/29°C) sunny location, allow 3–4

weeks to a saleable plant in a 2½-inch pot; or 4–6 weeks in 4-inch pot. It may take up to 4 weeks longer for plants to become established in cooler (less than 85°F/29°C) locations.

NOTE: Allow 14–28 days for the plants to form new roots, either if planted in the field or into pots. It is normal for the plants to appear dormant during the rooting phase. Keep the soil moist during the rooting phase, but do not over water. The plants will grow slowly until consistently warm summer weather arrives, and then they will grow very quickly.

HARVEST: To harvest the entire plant, cut the stalks off at the base of the plant. The plant will slowly sprout new stalks. Individual stalks can also be harvested as needed by cutting or pulling them from the base of the plant. Harvesting individual stalks is a good option for growers who want to have a continuous supply of stalks, or for growers who want to harvest only the thickest stalks that can be sold at a premium. Prepare stalks for market by removing dry or woody outer layers and cutting the long grassy tips, which can be dried and used like bay leaves in cooking, off the thicker bottom portion of the stalk. Lemon grass is usually sold by the bunch with 4–8 stalks that are at least ½ inches in diameter per bunch.

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