

## New lemongrass variety brings hope for drought-hit farmers

In an attempt to diversify the income of farmers, particularly those in the drought-affected areas, the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) here has come up with a new commercial variety of lemongrass plant that can be grown in places with water scarcity.

'The new lemongrass variety named 'suwarna' will definitely be a boon for farmers living in drought-affected areas, who till now were unable to reap the benefit from lemongrass that has a good market value,' CIMAP head of technology and business development A.K. Singh told reporters Thursday.

Lemongrass - an aromatic grass commonly known as 'nimbu ghas' - is a perennial crop that can be sown in cold and temperate regions.

'But now the new variety can be grown in drought-prone areas or places having water shortage,' Singh said.

'Due to its lemon-like odour, primarily because of the presence of a compound Citral, the grass is used in perfumes, soaps, cosmetics and beverages to obtain typical lemon note. The extract from the lemongrass is in huge demand in such industries,' Singh said.

Besides being drought-resistant, the other speciality of the new variety is its high yield of oil that makes its cultivation more profitable than the normal variety, the scientist said.

While the normal variety of lemongrass can produce about 100-125 kg of oil per hectare, the new variety can yield about 200 kg of oil per hectare. Moreover, the new variety also tends to grow faster than the normal variety, he said added.

After carrying out research for nearly five years, the CIMAP has now released planting material for the farmers.

'A limited amount of planting material has been released for farmers in Barabanki and Jhansi districts in Uttar Pradesh. Depending upon the feedback from the farmers, we will try to make further improvements in the new variety so that it can turn out more profitable for the farmers,' Singh said.

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