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# Lavender

*Delight your senses with the sights and smells of Lavender*

Lavender (*Lavandula*) is a romantic flower and every gardener should have at least one in their garden. They are native to the Mediterranean where they are an evergreen shrub. They are prized for their fragrance, medicinal uses, and ornamental qualities.

## Growing Requirements

Lavender is a tough plant and is extremely drought resistant, once established. Lavender plants tolerate many growing conditions, but they thrive in warm, well-drained soil with full sun. Like many plants grown for their essential oils, a lean soil encourages a higher concentration of oils. An alkaline and especially chalky soil enhances the fragrance. When first starting your lavender plants, give them a handful of manure or compost in the planting hole and to keep them regularly watered during their first growing season.

Dampness, more often than cold, is responsible for killing lavender plants. Dampness can come in the form of wet roots during the winter months or high humidity in the summer. Protect your lavender plants from harsh winter winds. Planting next to a stone or brick wall provides additional heat and protection.

## Hardiness

While you can grow some varieties of lavender in Zone 5, it is unlikely you will be able to grow a lavender hedge. More realistically you can expect to have plants that do well when the weather cooperates and to experience the occasional loss of a plant or two after a severe winter or a wet, humid summer. For zones 7-10 lavender can thrive if given the proper growing requirements listed above.

## Pruning

Lavender plants can be pruned simply by harvesting the flowers. If you want to keep them well shaped and to encourage new growth, a bit of spring pruning is recommended. You can cut back the taller varieties by approximately one-third their height. You can prune lower growing varieties back by a couple of inches or cut half of the new growth back. If your lavender suffers die-back due to a harsh winter, it is recommended that you wait to prune your plants until you see some new growth at the base of the plant in the spring. If you disturb the damaged plants too soon in the season, they give up trying.

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## Growing Lavender in Containers

You can always grow your lavender in pots and move it to follow the sun and move it to protect it for the winter. Keep in mind that although lavender has a large, spreading root system, it prefers growing in a tight spot. A pot that can accommodate the rootball with a couple of inches to spare would be a good choice. Too large a pot will only encourage excessive dampness.

Ensure that the pot has plenty of drainage. To prevent water pooling in the pot, place about an inch of loose gravel at the bottom. Root rot is one of the few problems experienced by lavender plants. Use a loose, soilless mix for planting and remember that container grown lavender requires more water than garden grown plants. It is also important to remember to water when the soil, not the plant, appears dry and to water at the base of the plant to limit dampness on the foliage.

## Using Lavender

Lavender makes an excellent companion plant for almost anything from roses to cabbage. The flowers keep their fragrance when dried. For best drying results, harvest the flowers as the first two buds begin to open. It is best cut them early in the morning after the dew has dried. Hang in small bunches upside down in a warm spot with good air circulation.

Besides being beautiful and aromatic, lavender flowers are also edible. They can be used raw in salads, added to soups and stews, used as a seasoning, baked into cookies and brewed into tea.

## Commonly Available Varieties

*Lavandula angustifolia* (English Lavender) Zones 5-8

- 'Munstead' blue-purple flowers, 18 inches tall
- 'Hidcote' dark purple flowers, 24 inches tall

*L. x intermedia* Zones 5-8

- 'Provence' dries well, 30 inches tall
- 'Grosso' highly disease resistant, 30 inches tall

*L. dentata* (French Lavender) Zones 6-9

- This is a bushy, spreading shrub that produces dense purple-blue flower spikes that are very pretty, but only mildly fragrant. 3 feet tall

*L. stoechas* (Spanish Lavender) Zones 6-9

- Flower repeatedly throughout the summer
- Varieties include 'Otto Quast' and the newer dwarf variety 'Anouk'



'Munstead'



'Hidcote'



'Anouk'

\*Please call Hunters Garden Centre to confirm the varieties we have available.

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