

The Herb Society of America

ESSENTIAL FACTS FOR LAVENDER *Lavandula* spp.



Lavandula angustifolia

Family: Lamiaceae

Latin Name: *Lavandula* spp.

Common Name: Lavender

Growth: Sub-shrub, 6" to 48" tall with flowers arranged on spikes above the foliage

Hardiness: Variable, depending on species/cultivars

Light: Full sun

Soil: Well-drained gravelly soil

Water: Little additional water once established

Use: Ornamental, fragrance, culinary, economic, medicinal

Propagation: Best by cuttings taken in late spring or early summer or by layering

History

Both scientific and common names are thought to be derived from the Latin, *lavare*, "to wash"; however, since there is no evidence that lavender was used in the baths in ancient Rome the name may have come from the medieval period. Lavender is native to the Mediterranean region, and one of the species, *Lavandula stoechas*, was grown by both the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is thought that the Romans took the plant to the British Isles. It was used during the Middle Ages both medicinally and as a strewing herb; thus the French name, *lavindula*, could have come from the Latin *livere* meaning "to be livid or blue." Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), a Benedictine abbess as well as a musician, mystic, and herbalist, in her book *Physica*, speaks of the benefits of the lavender plant.

Description and Uses

Lavandula angustifolia - Common or English Lavender - native to the Mediterranean area

Most cultivars are hardy to Zone 6. They range in size from dwarf (6-8") to high (27-46"). Flower colors range from white to pink to lavender to purple. The leaves are 2.5" long and narrow, green to grey/green. The main components of the oils extracted from the flowers are linalool, 28-49% and linalyl acetate 12-45%. The oils are considered GRAS (generally recognized as safe) and they are used in perfumes, cosmetics, aromatherapy, and massage therapy. Caution should be used because the undiluted oil can cause an allergic rash.

Some of the more easily available cultivars are:

Lavandula angustifolia 'Hidcote', *L. angustifolia* 'Maillette', *L. angustifolia* 'Munstead'

Lavandula x intermedia - Lavandin

This is a cross of *L. angustifolia* (Common) and *L. latifolia* (Spike).

Most are hardy to Zone 6. They are tall to very tall, up to 46" high and wide. The flowers do not have a sweet scent; it is

more the scent of eucalyptus. The colors are lavender/blue with one white variety, *L. x intermedia* 'Hidcote White'. Most of these plants are sterile; therefore, it is best to propagate vegetatively or by layering. The oils contain linalool 32-47%, linalyl acetate 17-42% and 1,8-cineole 6-12%. The oil is GRAS to 0.3 to 18 ppm. Because the scent is not as refined as that of *L. angustifolia*, it is used in more economic household products. Some of the more easily available cultivars are:

L. x intermedia 'Dutch', *L. x intermedia* 'Grosso', *L. x intermedia* 'Hidcote Giant'

Growing Lavenders in Containers

Outside:

Use sterile soil mix with added perlite for good drainage. A well-balanced slow-release fertilizer, 15-15-15, should be used because nutrients leach out of the soil with constant container watering. Make sure the container does not dry out. Do not allow plants to sit in water. Soil will need to be changed every year.

L. x intermedias are less suitable than some of the others because of their size. Smaller *L. angustifolias* do well, as do the less hardy *L. x gingsii* 'Goodwin Creek Grey' and *L. buchii*. *L. stoechas*, which is showing up in many garden centers, gets a very large root ball and may have to be reotted during the growing season.

Growing Lavenders in Containers Inside:

Same as above; place pot in a south facing window. Fertilize with a well-balanced fertilizer. The best to try inside are *L. x gingsii* 'Goodwin Creek Grey', *L. buchii* and any *L. dentata*.

Because the subject of lavenders is a very large and complex one, too vast to cover in a page or two, here are a few less hardy lavenders, some of which have been mentioned above, that are pleasant to grow.

L. buchii - Zone 9-11 - native to the Canary Islands

L. dentata - Zone 9 - native to eastern Spain and the Balearic Islands. A nice variegated cultivar to look for is 'Linda Ligon'.

L. x gingsii 'Goodwin Creek Grey' - Zone 7 and up

L. multifida - Zone 9 - native to the Mediterranean and southern Portugal

L. latifolia - Zone 7b - native to the Mediterranean and Portugal

L. stoechas - Zone 7b - native to the Mediterranean and Portugal. Two cultivars somewhat available are 'Otto Quast' and *f. rosea* 'Kew Red'.

Culture & Propagation

Soil:

Well-drained gravelly soil; the natural environment is poor soil in dry, hilly areas. Lavenders are lovers of lime so it is suggested that when planting in the garden, a handful of either crushed oyster shells or turkey grit should be placed in the bottom of the prepared hole. Place the plant in the hole, water it, fill with soil and then spread a generous handful of the oyster shells/turkey grit around the plant. Not only does this aid in drainage, it reflects both light and heat up into the plant. Be careful to space plants so that they have good air circulation. Avoid excess fertilizing. Older plants may like an application of bonemeal.

Water:

Once established, lavenders require little additional water but when watering either trickle water or use drip irrigation. Try not to water in the late afternoon. It is important that the foliage dry before nighttime, to avoid fungal infections.

Propagation:

Best by cuttings taken in late spring or early summer or layering, because many of the seeds do not come true. The

cuttings, with at least three or four nodes, should be dipped in rooting hormone and placed in a well draining sterile soil mix amended with perlite. The cuttings should not be covered because of the danger of mildew and rot. Good air circulation is important both with cuttings and mature plants. Pinch new plants to encourage branching and remove any flowers on newly planted specimens.

Pruning:

Plants will grow better with annual pruning. In spring, do not prune until new growth is seen; at that time cut back by 1/3. Later new growth can be cut back 1/3 to stimulate new growth at the base of the plant. Do not prune out old wood unless completely dead. Prune after first bloom to stimulate a second bloom. Avoid heavy pruning after late August. Plants left unpruned for several years usually cannot be restored.

Problems:

If leaves look yellowish, plant will benefit from an application of a well balanced fertilizer, 15-15-15. If leaves turn yellow and then brown, the plant probably has root rot and there is no remedy; discard the plant. Aphids can be a problem; they can be removed with a strong spray of water or by the application of insecticidal soap spray.

Uses

Medicinal:

Historically lavender has been used to treat depression, insomnia, anxiety and fatigue. Research supports the calming, soothing and sedative effects of lavender when inhaled.

Craft:

While both the foliage and flowers are fragrant, typically flower buds are harvested and dried to scent potpourri, sleep pillows and other projects.

Culinary:

L. angustifolia flowers are preferred and used in teas, cookies and other confections as well as savory dishes. Lavender is a component of "Herbes de Provence" and Lady Grey Tea.

L. stoechas ssp. pedunculata



References

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University of Maryland Medical Center. 2011. "Lavender." Last modified March 5, 2011. <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/lavender-000260.htm>.

Upson, Tim, and Susyn Andrews. 2004. *The Genus Lavandula*. Portland, OR: Timber Press.

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