



Lavender

Lavender's fragrance alone would be enough to warrant high praise, and most of the time, lavender is used for aromatherapy purposes. Outside of sachets and soaps, it is a very useful, important herb.

History of Lavender

Its name derives from the Latin verb meaning "to wash"; both early Romans and Greeks scented bathwater and soaps with the herb. In the Middle Ages, Lavender was used as an herb for love and romance, but it worked two ways: It was considered an aphrodisiac, but it was reported that sprinkling Lavender water on someone's head would make the wearer chaste.



Throughout history, Lavender flowers and leaves were used to deter moths from linens and clothing. Lavender sachets have also been used to freshen sickrooms. There was a story that the Asp would nest in Lavender bushes, and this drove up the price of Lavender. Medicinally, throughout history, Lavender has been used in Europe to quiet coughs and soothe rumbling digestive systems. Until WWI, Lavender was also used to disinfect wounds.

Uses for Lavender

Most commercially-grown lavender is used for perfume and other fragrance products. One acre of healthy plants will yield 15-20 pounds of Lavender oil. Aside from its uses in fragrance, soaps, and sachets, many people use Lavender in crafts, dried arrangements, and wreaths. Lavender also has culinary purposes. The fragrant flowers and leaves have been used sparingly to flavor vinegars and jellies, and the flowers can be used as an edible flower in salads or dried and used in tea. I have used the flowers to make lavender sugar that I dust onto sugar cookies or shortbread.

British herbalist Maude Grieve believed that a medicinal cordial of Lavender oil, Rosemary oil, cinnamon bark, nutmeg, and sandalwood steeped in wine for a few days could relieve indigestion when taken in small doses of 1 tsp. Lavender is safe when used in moderation: 1 teaspoon of flowers to a pint of water is safe for infusions. Most often, Lavender is used for skin irritations, sore feet, and muscle aches. A few drops of Lavender oil in your bath can be very soothing. Lavender has been used to aid the body as a carminative, antispasmodic, and a stimulant. At one time, Lavender was even used as an ingredient in smelling salts.

Types of Lavender

There are many varieties of Lavender. The English varieties of Munstead and Hidcote are the hardiest for our climate. The spike varieties of Grosso and Provence are also hardy here. We find the French and Spanish are not as hardy. Also, English varieties are highly-prized and most commonly used for their fragrance. In the opinion of those in the perfume world, the English varieties have aromas



that are more complex and delicate. It is often noted that the harsher the climate, the better quality the oils and fragrance.

Types:

- Lavender stoechas
- Lavandula dentata-fernlike foliage
- Lavandula alba-white flowers
- Lavandula angustifolia-dwarf and compact
- Lavandula triphylla-small leaflets at the base of flowers
- Lavandula angustifolia rosea-pink flowers
- Lavandula spike-coarser; oils are used in lacquers and varnishes. Dye from this flower is also used in traditional Chinese painting
- Lavandula latifolia-oil is used to stretch the fragrance of higher quality lavenders

The hardiness of Lavenders varies by variety, but most range from zone 5 to zone 8. Lavender prefers coarse drainage, and likes a ph of 7.1. Once established, Lavender is very drought tolerant. They prefer full sun. I find that after 4-5 years, you may need to give your Lavender plant an overhaul. Cut out old, woody stems and branches and plant new plants every few years to sustain a good supply of leaves and flowers. Annual varieties are easy to grow indoors in pots. I grow annual varieties all winter. Winter temperatures indoors should be 40-50 degrees at night, and 45-55 during the day. These plants need a good amount of light.

Bonus: Deer, elk, and rabbits will generally pass on Lavender.

Harvest

Most often, Lavender blooms from June to July. Harvest when the flowers first begin to open or when they are fully open. Harvest in the morning before the heat of the day. Either dry them on screens in a cool and shaded area, or hanging upside down out of the sun. Dried flowers will remain aromatic for a long time. Cutting spent blooms will help the plant to flourish.