

# A guide to growing lavender

## Wanda Valencia

Lavender is a favorite of herb growers, and anyone who grows it never seems to have enough of it. This aromatic garden ornamental is also useful for crafts and cosmetics. The silvery foliage and purple blossoms are outstanding in borders, and the blossoms attract bees. Lavender has many uses depending on the type grown and if you have the culinary type, it makes a nice flavored water. Lavender oils are available at natural food stores and on-line. Lavender has a calming effect; just one whiff and you will feel more relaxed.

The most familiar lavender is the English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) which grows best in zones 5-8 in full sun. It likes light, well-drained soil with pH 6.7-7.3. It is a perennial with a height of 2-3 feet, shrubby with slender gray-green leaves which flowers June to July with lavender blossoms on tall spikes.

Seeds do not always produce plants identical to the original, so it is best to propagate with cuttings 2-3 inches long taken from side shoots in spring or fall. Space 12-30 inches apart. Pinch away flowers on first-year plants to encourage good growth. Provide shelter from winter wind; hardiness, of course, varies with species. Some growers feel that plants weaken

with age and might need replacing after five years. Remove old plants each spring, and rejuvenate the soil with compost or well-aged manure before planting new, young plants.

Well-drained soil is best for planting and will prevent water logging and discourage fungal diseases. Handpick caterpillar pests, or spray with BT if populations are heavy.

Harvest foliage after the first year; pick flower spikes early in the bloom stage during dry weather. Hang in bunches away from sunlight to preserve.

Other species include French Lavender (*L. dentata*) which is less hardy than English lavender; Italian or Spanish Lavender (*L. latifolia*) which produces more oil of lesser quality than English lavender; it is known also as spike lavender. Often oil from Italian lavender is mixed with oil of higher quality.

The Lavender Association of Western Colorado (LAWC) is working on bringing lavender to Western Colorado as an alternative cash crop. A demonstration

plot of lavender and lavadin is under cultivation in the Arboretum at the Gardens. Also a research plot of 5 cultivars has been planted. View the project by clicking on the button at the Lavender Portal at [www.westernslopegardening.org](http://www.westernslopegardening.org). Meetings are held monthly. For further information contact the president Kathy Kimbrough at [jkknkak@bresnan.net](mailto:jkknkak@bresnan.net). Read

Kathy's lavender research on the gardening website.

Look for lavender plants and products at the Fruita Farmers Market which begins on June 27 and runs through October, weather

permitting. Market times are 8-12 noon each Saturday except Fall Festival Saturday. Alma del Sol (Tom and Barbara Lucks) will be responsible for the products and information.

The Lavender Project is just getting started and offers opportunity for anyone interested in lavender production, agri-tourism, festivals and being a part of the adventures to join the group as they work to promote the growth of lavender in Western Colorado.

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