

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF GROWING GORGEOUS LAVENDER

Growing tips for this fragrant, easy-care plant that thrives in sunny locations

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Lavender, an herb with many culinary uses, also makes a stunning addition to borders and perennial gardens, providing sweeping drifts of color from early summer into fall. With its silvery-green foliage, upright flower spikes and compact shrub-like form, lavender is ideal for creating informal hedges. You can also harvest it for fragrant floral arrangements, sachets, and potpourri.

- **ENGLISH LAVENDER**



Botanical name:

L. angustifolia

Zones:

5-8

Bloom time:

June to August

Height:

2 to 3 feet

Flower colors:

Lavender, deep blue-purple, light pink, white

Despite its Mediterranean origin, English lavender was so named because it grows well in that country's cooler climate and has long been a staple in English herb gardens. The gray-green foliage and whorls of

tiny flowers make this one of the most attractive lavenders in the garden. It's one of the most cold-hardy varieties and the best for culinary use because of its low camphor content.

Although all lavender (*Lavandula*) is native to the Mediterranean, there are many varieties offering a vast selection of bloom times, colors, flower forms, and sizes. "Bloom time can vary drastically between different locations—where one lavender blooms at the start of June, only 20 miles away could be a very different outcome," says Kristin Nielsen, president of the Lavender Association of Western Colorado.

Contrary to the name, not all lavenders are purple. Some hybrids come in other lovely pastel hues such as violet blue, rose, pale pink, white, and even yellow. The leaves can also vary in shape and color. To extend the bloom season as well as the color palette, consider planting several varieties.

CLIMATE CONSIDERATIONS

Lavender is a perennial that will last for several years under the right conditions. Because of its Mediterranean origin, lavender loves blazing hot sun and dry soil. If your lavender doesn't thrive, it's most likely due to overwatering, too much shade, and high humidity levels.

English lavenders and their hybrids are the best varieties for cooler climates, since they are cold hardy north to Zone 5. However, they will grow best in a sheltered location with winter protection. For southern gardens in extremely hot, humid climates, Spanish and French lavenders are more tolerant of the moist conditions, but should be spaced apart to allow good air circulation.

If your winters are too harsh or your soil is heavy and dense, consider growing lavender in containers. They will flourish as long as they receive at least 8 hours of direct sunlight a day and are planted in a high-quality potting mix with good drainage. In winter, bring your container plants indoors and place them in a sunny window. See [these recipes](#) for ideas of how to use lavender in containers.

GROWING LAVENDER

Growing lavender is easy and rewarding. Lavender can be grown in garden beds or in pots. To grow lavender successfully it needs well-drained soil and full sun. In arid climates lavender grows well as a perennial, but in humid climates it is often grown as an annual.

Learn how to grow lavender:

1. Purchase healthy lavender plants for your garden
2. Bring them home and water them if you can't plant them immediately
3. Select a location for your lavender that receives full sun
4. Set the potted plants in different spots to decide where they look best
5. Unpot, plant and water your lavender
6. Provide consistent watering until the lavender becomes established
7. Prune back your lavender each spring

PLANTING, PRUNING & WATERING TIPS

All lavender varieties require well-drained soil, especially during the winter months. To ensure good drainage, mix some sand or gravel into the soil before you plant lavender or grow the plants in mounds, raised beds, or on slopes. Instead of applying moisture-holding organic mulches, consider using rock or stone, especially in humid climates.

Once established, lavender is very low-maintenance and requires minimal watering or pruning. If the stems become woody as the plant matures, prune it back by about half its height in the spring to promote fresh new growth and robust flowering. Plants that aren't pruned also have a tendency to sprawl, leaving a hole in the middle. In the summer, clip faded blooms to encourage repeat blooming throughout the season.

Justin Claibourn of Cowlitz Falls Lavender Company in Randle, Washington offers the following advice:

- **Check your soil's pH.** "If it's too acidic you can kiss your lavender goodbye," he says. They will look great at first, but after a few years you may notice plants dying off randomly. Once the roots grow out into the native, un-amended soil trouble can begin. Most universities will check your pH relatively cheaply or some hardware stores for free. You can amend your soil with lime to better accommodate your lavender plants.
- **Don't overwater.** "As a large-scale grower, we typically irrigate twice a year—that's it," states Claibourn. Give your lavender a long soak to promote root growth, short and frequent watering cycles result in unhealthy roots that may rot.

• DESIGN IDEAS FOR LAVENDER

- Use lavender along walkways and garden paths where you can enjoy their scent and where they can benefit from the heat reflected off the pavement.
- Plant in formal or informal [herb gardens](#), where the cool, gray-green foliage sets off other green herbs and plants.
- Create aromatic hedges or borders along fences and garden walls as shown in [this video for Sweet Romance® lavender](#).
- Use lavender as a [natural pest repellent](#) near patios and porches. The scent deters mosquitoes, flies, fleas, and other problem insects while attracting butterflies and bees.
- Plant with drought-tolerant companions such as [coneflower](#), [sedum](#), [black-eyed Susan](#), [roses](#), and [shasta daisies](#).

IDEAS FOR USING LAVENDER IN THE KITCHEN

A member of the mint family, lavender has been used for centuries as a versatile, unexpected flavoring in both sweet and savory foods. English lavenders are the best varieties for culinary purposes, and both the buds and leaves can be used fresh or dried. Because the flavor of lavender is strong, use it sparingly so it won't overpower your dishes. The buds are best harvested right before they fully open, when the essential oils are most potent.

- Immerse a few dried lavender buds in a jar of sugar to give it a sweet aroma. Use the sugar for baking and in desserts.
- Chop the fresh buds and add to a cake batter or sweet pastry dough before baking.
- Add flower buds to preserves or fruit compotes to give them subtle spicy notes.
- Sprinkle fresh lavender on a salad as a garnish.
- Use fresh lavender to infuse teas, cocktails, and other beverages.
- Use chopped buds and leaves to flavor roast lamb, chicken, or rabbit.
- Make Herbes de Provence by blending dried lavender with thyme, savory, and rosemary.