

Lavender (botanical name *Lavandula*) is a hardy, aromatic small shrub native to the mountainous regions of the Western Mediterranean. Lavender is extensively grown for perfume, for herbal use, and as a garden ornamental. Flower colors can be the namesake lavender blue, dark purple, white, or even pink; foliage is usually gray-green. There are three species of lavender commonly grown in the Northwest: English (*Lavandula angustifolia*), French (*L. x intermedia*), and Spanish (*L. stoechas*). A fourth variety, woolly lavender, is somewhat tender and needs a sheltered location to thrive.

Lavender is generally easy to grow if you give it the conditions it likes. Plant in lean, fast-draining soil with an abundance of sun (a minimum of 6 hours per day). Wet feet in winter is a bigger killer than cold for most lavenders here in the Northwest!

Lavender requires minimal care once established. You can feed once a year with an organic rose and flower fertilizer, but if the plant is growing well no fertilizer should be necessary. Lavender is quite drought-tolerant once established, but watering every few weeks if we have a prolonged summer drought will keep your plants performing better. The first summer your plants are in the ground, they would prefer to be watered (deeply) once a week or so. Plants in containers will also appreciate more frequent watering, but again, never let your lavender sit in water or get wet feet.

Pruning is the only regular care most lavenders will need. Start pruning lavender plants when they are transplanted and continue to prune at least once a year for the life of the plant so your lavender doesn't get too leggy. The best time to prune lavender is after flowering is complete, in late summer or early fall, well before any frosty weather. However, any time after a flower spike has completely bloomed out, it can be cut off at the base where the flower stalk meets the body of the plant. This will promote vigorous, healthy growth and keep your plants in good shape.

Additional pruning in early spring may be beneficial if the plant has grown abundantly the summer before. Spanish lavender can be pruned back to half its size if you want to reshape the plant. English and French lavender varieties can be pruned back even harder, to a third of their blooming size. However, spring pruning may delay the plant's flowering.

To dry lavender, cut the flower stalks just as the blooms are opening and tie them into small bundles. Hang the bundles in a warm dry location to dry.

Bees and butterflies tend to love lavender flowers; plant long-blooming varieties as part of your pollinator garden. If you aren't drying your lavender, letting the flowers go to seed will also attract birds such as juncos to eat the seeds. Finally, lavender's fragrance is said to be mildly deterrent to mosquitoes and fleas.

ENGLISH LAVENDER (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Plants average 24 inches tall with shorter flower stems and flower heads than other species. Dwarf and compact varieties are available. English lavender makes good dried flowers and sachets; blooms are high in essential oil. New growth returns quickly in the spring. This is the hardiest lavender for the Northwest. Many varieties are available; some popular ones include:

- 'Betty's Blue'** 18-20" tall; dark purple flowers. A favorite from Oregon – dries well
- 'Hidcote'** 15-18" tall; deep violet flowers; classic English variety; **'Hidcote Pink'** has pink flowers
- 'Munstead'** 15-18" tall; fragrant lavender blue flowers; classic English variety; long-blooming
- 'Pastor's Pride'** 24" tall; fragrant deep purple flowers; repeat bloomer
- 'Platinum Blonde'** 16-24" tall; lavender blue flowers; unique foliage, sage green edged cream
- 'Sentivia Blue'** 12-16" tall; compact variety with very fragrant, violet-blue, long-lasting flowers
- 'Thumbelina Leigh'** 12-15" tall; deep lavender blue flowers; compact plant with green foliage
- 'Twickel Purple'** 24-30" tall purple flower spikes fan out around the plant; great cut flowers

FRENCH LAVENDER (*Lavandula x intermedia*)

A hybrid between *L. angustifolia* and *L. latifolia* with longer stems, spikier white or purple flower heads, larger foliage and a stronger fragrance than plain English lavender. Some popular varieties include:

- 'Alba'** 18-24" tall; pure white flowers, gray-green foliage
- 'Grosso'** 24-30" tall; fragrant violet flowers; long blooming, and very hardy
- 'Phenomenal'** 24" tall; classic color and fragrance; early blooming; very hardy
- 'Provence' ('du Provence')** 24" tall; classic perfume variety with very aromatic lavender flowers; repeat bloomer; great for lavender wands

WOOLLY LAVENDER (*Lavandula x lanata*, *L. x chaytoriae*)

These species have soft silver white foliage with bright purple flowers. Flower spikes are 1 – 4" long. Woolly lavender needs superb drainage and air circulation to survive our winters. Use these varieties in sheltered sites, or grow as an annual.

SPANISH LAVENDER (*Lavandula stoechas*)

Spanish lavender has unusual flowers: the large squarish flower heads look like tiny pineapples topped with rabbit ears (called "bracts"). The pungent fragrance is also unusual, somewhere between lavender and rosemary. Plants generally grow 24-36" high. Prune the old flower stalks back after flowering for repeat bloom. Varieties include:

- 'Anouk' series** 24" tall plants; deep purple flowers with bracts of lilac, deep rose, or white;
- 'Silver Anouk'** has silver foliage
- 'Bandera' series** very compact, 7-9" tall plants; purple flowers, soft pink or purple bracts
- 'Berry Ruffles' series** 24" tall plants with purple or pink flowers, very large ruffled bracts
- 'New Madrid' series** 18" tall plants; colors include **'Blue,'** unusual blue-violet with white bracts
- 'Otto Quast'** Rosy purple flowers with smoky purple bracts; large, long-lasting blooms
- 'Wings of Night'** Deep purple flowers with purple bracts; dwarf variety, 12" tall