

LAVENDER

Lavender

Lavender belongs to the Mint family, a large family which includes many different herbs.

Lavender is derived from the Latin "lavare" which means "to wash" and that is what the Romans did with it. The lavender of choice at the Roman baths was Spanish lavender (*L. stoechas*) and French lavender (*L. dentata*). Some lavenders have unusual or particularly beautiful flowers while others stand out for their foliage, both color and shape.

The biggest differences between lavenders are in their heights, flower colors, size of flower heads and time of blooms.

English Lavender (*L. angustifolia*) – The most popular garden lavender in North America. Also called true lavender. Hardest of all lavenders. Tolerates cold fairly well. Has sweeter scented flowers. Smaller plants that are slower growing and more compact. Bloom early in the summer with many plants blooming again in the fall. Should be pruned hard in either spring or fall.

Culinary – Sweetest smelling and flavored of all lavenders. Can be used for all recipes that call for lavender flowers or foliage. Delicate flavor of the blossoms is a great addition to ice cream, sorbets, baked desserts, and candied flower assortments. Fresh flowers can be crystallized or added to jams, ice creams and vinegars.

Spanish Lavender (*L. stoechas*) – This type of lavender produced the most commonly distilled oil in the Middle Ages. Ideal for making potpourris and sachets, and for using in floral arrangements. In zones lower than 8, this variety should be grown as container plants and brought indoors for the winter. They are only reliable down to about 20 degrees F. Tolerates more acid soils than English lavenders.

Profuse in most climates in early summer, somewhat overlapping blooming period of English lavenders. In many areas, especially those with mild summers and winters, an early rush of bloom occurs in mid spring, plants bloom in early summer with another flush of color in fall. Be sure to prune after peak summer bloom to encourage shorter and sturdier flower stems.

Good plant for indoors and thrives in large pots.

Spanish lavender yields more oil per acre harvested than English lavender.

Although scent of Spanish lavender is a bit more medicinal than that of English lavender, the cooked or grilled foliage has little medicinal taste and stands up well to game, red meat and other hardy dishes. This is not the foliage to be used for sweet desserts, ice cream or sorbet. Not a good variety to use for culinary purposes.

French Lavender (*L. dentate*) – Bright green leaves with toothed leaf margins and a strong camphor-lavender or rosemary-like scent. Blooms nearly all year if given enough light and warmth. One of finer species for warmer gardens. Fairly cold tender. May need to come into a greenhouse for the winter. Not as fragrant as other lavenders but the spikes are very colorful.

Mainly used as aromatic ornamental but may be used for dried potpourris. A good lavender for topiaries. Nice in containers. Significant landscaping plant. Attracts hummingbirds more than other lavenders.

Lavandin (*L. x intermedia*) – Hybrid between English lavender (*L. angustifolia*) and spike lavender (*L. latifolia*). Plants resulting from this cross usually produce sterile seeds and all new lavandin plants are obtained from cuttings. Robust plant, adapting readily to difficult climatic conditions and poor soil. Can withstand some below freezing temperatures but not continuous cold without some protective covering. Rounded with long, gray-green to gray leaves. Long spikes of highly fragrant flowers, from dark violet to white. Yields up to 10 times the essential oil of *L. angustifolia*. Native to middle elevations. Can be pruned quite hard.

Mostly used for its oil and aroma in cosmetic toiletries, household cleaning products and scented candles and room fresheners.

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