

LAVANDULA
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Introduction: History, Botany, & Anatomy

A Brief Natural History

Native to the Mediterranean basin, Lavandula belongs to the mint family (Lamiaceae). The genus name derives from the Latin lavare ('to wash'), a nod to its ancient use in Roman bathhouses. Romans carried it across their empire, Egyptians used it in mummification; medieval herbalists prescribed it for everything from headaches to melancholy.

Botany: Why Gardeners Love Lavender

For the Senses!	For the Ecosystem!
Lavender's essential oil is among the most studied in aromatherapy. Foliage is fragrant, even when not in bloom and it can release scent at the slightest brush.	Few plants rival lavender's pollinator value. Honey bees, bumblebees, native solitary bees, and butterflies are drawn in tremendous numbers to the flowers across a long season.

Anatomy of a Lavender Plant

Lavandula is made of 5 distinct parts, including the stems and roots. But the unique flower spikes, calyx, and foliage are the parts of the lavender plant that get the most attention.

- Flower Spikes: Small, tubular florets cover the Lavandula plant and are the main ornamental and harvest feature.
- Calyx: A papery bract cups each floret and retains fragrance, even after the petals drop.
- Foliage: Linear to pinnate and silvery to gray/green in color, Lavandula's foliage has a year-round structure and is always aromatic!

Growing Tips & Care

Lavandula has developed a bit of a ‘plant it and forget it’ reputation. However, that reputation is only earned once you get the fundamentals of growing just right. Master these core conditions, and you will be rewarded for many years!

Sunlight

Full sun is non-negotiable and needs 6-8 hours at a minimum. Lavandula grown in the shade becomes leggy, produces fewer flowers, and is far more susceptible to fungal disease. South or west-facing exposures are ideal in the PNW.

Soil

Well-draining, lean, slightly alkaline soil is ideal. Rich soil leads to excessive leafy growth at the expense of blooms, while sandy loam or gravelly soil perfectly mimics native conditions!

Water

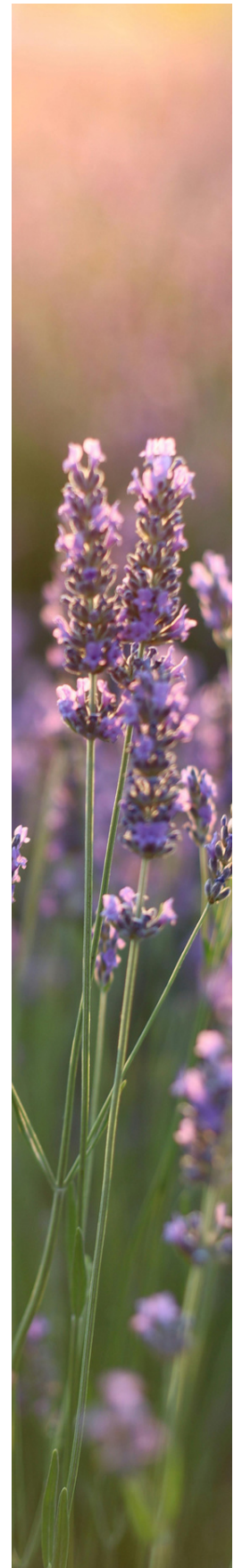
Most varieties are drought-tolerant and only require deep, infrequent watering. Water new plants weekly and mature plants monthly in summer, with caution. Overwatering is the #1 killer!

Pruning

Prune twice. The first prune should happen right after the first bloom, but should be done lightly and only to remove spent spikes. A second, harder cut should be in late summer, leaving 2-3" of leafy growth. Never cut into old, woody stems as Lavandula cannot regenerate from bare wood.

PNW Tip: Fighting Humidity

The PNW’s wet winters are lavender’s greatest enemy. Plant on a slope or raised bed, space plants for airflow, and use gravel mulch!



The Three Major Types

English Lavender; <i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> Popular varieties: Hidcote, Munstead, Big Time Blue, La Diva Spirit White, SuperBlue	
Flower: Compact 1-2" spikes on long, unbranched stems. NO showy bracts.	Color: True violet-blue to pale pink; tightly packed small florets.
Foliage: Narrow, gray/green, non-toothed.	Scent: Sweet, clean, floral - the traditional scent!
Size: 18-24" compact mound, tidiest habit.	Hardiness: Zones 5-8, most cold hardy.

Spanish Lavender; <i>Lavandula stoechas</i> Popular varieties: Anouk, Otto Quast, Primavera, The Princess	
Flower: Show, fat, pineapple-shaped heads with a large rabbit-ear bract on top. Early bloomer!	Color: Dark purple compact florets with showy purple or pink bracts.
Foliage: Slightly broader, gray/green color.	Scent: Resinous, camphor-flowered, less 'floral'.
Size: 2-3' tall and wide, upright to mounding.	Hardiness: Zones 7-10; NOT PNW cold hardy.

Lavandin (Hybrid Varieties); <i>Lavandula x intermedia</i> Popular varieties: Grosso, Provence, Phenomenal, Sensational!	
Flower: Long spikes often branched at the base - the most dramatic, tallest flower stems.	Color: Violet-blue; slightly larger and lighter than the English parent.
Foliage: Wider than English - strongly and intensely aromatic when brushed!	Scent: Bold, slightly camphorous. Lavender scent used in commercial essential oils.
Size: Largest type: 2.5-4' tall, 3-5' wide.	Hardiness: Zones 5-8; cold hardy.

Spotlight: PNW Standouts

The PNW isn't one climate - it's many! Damp marine air demands different choices than the hot, dry summers of the Columbia Basin. Here's how to match variety to microclimate, influenced by the two distinct, most famous climates in the PNW:

Coastal & Western PNW	Inland & Eastern PNW
Climate: With cool summers, mild winters, high humidity, heavy October-May rainfall, and a marine cloud cover, drainage and airflow are everything!	Climate: Hot, dry summers (temperatures reaching 90-100°F), cold winters, low humidity, and minimal summer rains mean ideal lavender conditions, except for the winter cold!
Strategy: For success west of the Cascades, you'll need: • Raised beds or slopes, never flat clay; • Gravel mulch, not bark; • English and Hybrid varieties; • Avoid Spanish varieties, as they rarely overwinter reliably in overly wet, coastal PNW conditions.	Inland Advantage/Strategies: You have lavender's ideal sun and dryness. The challenge is really the harsh winter cold: • Use Zone 5-6 cultivars; • Gravel mulch crowns; • Avoid fall fertilizing - it promotes tender growth that won't survive hard freezes; • Handles a wide variety of lavender types!
Top Varieties (and why they work!) • Phenomenal ◦ Most disease-resistant lavandin, this variety has been proven to work well in wet climates. • Munstead ◦ A classic English variety, it is compact and excellent in damp conditions. • Hidcote ◦ Deep purple in color, tidy habit, and handles coastal damp well!	Top Varieties (and why they work!): • Grosso ◦ The commercial standard for oil - thrives in heat and eastern soils. • Provence ◦ Tall, graceful spikes, this hybrid tolerates heat, drought, and alkaline. • Hidcote ◦ Hidcote demands full sun and low humidity. The dry, desert-like heat during the summer prevents diseases.



Seasonal Planting Guide

January-February
• Order seeds and plugs early - top cultivars sell out fast. • Plan new beds; observe drainage patterns during winter rains. • Check stored, dried lavender - re-bunch satchets if fragrance fades.
March-April
• Start seeds indoors 8-10 weeks before last frost date. • Clear winter debris gently from crowns once frost risk passes. • Spanish lavender begins blooming - earliest color in the garden!
May-June
• Prime planting window - set transplants out after first frost. • English lavender peaks! Harvest when $\frac{1}{3}$ of buds are open. • Light prune after first flush to encourage re-bloom in fall.
July-August
• Lavandin peaks - prime time for large cutting bundles. • Harvest 12-15 stems per bundle, rubber band, and hang to dry. • Deep water every 2-3 weeks, only if there is no rainfall.
September-October
• Main pruning window: cut to 2-3" of leafy growth - no lower! • Plant new starts now; roots establish well in the cool fall soil. • Do NOT fertilize - this promotes frost-vulnerable new growth.
November-December
• Apply gravel mulch around crowns before hard freeze; • In Zone 6 and below, loosely cover with evergreen boughs.

Hidden Uses

Lavender is extraordinarily versatile - in the garden and far beyond. From formal hedges to wild meadows, and from the kitchen to the medicine cabinet, this plant offers more uses than almost any other perennial!



Sleep & Anxiety Aid

Clinical studies have found lavender oil preparations reduce anxiety comparably to some pharmaceuticals. A sachet under the pillow is also a well-supported folk remedy for insomnia!



Culinary Use

Only English lavender has a good taste for culinary use - Spanish and hybrid varieties have a more medicinal flavor. But, use sparingly - lavender is about 3x more intense than rosemary!



Natural Moth Repellent

Sachets of dried lavender repel moths as effectively as cedar - and for many, they smell far better! Squeeze sachets periodically to release fresh oil.



Fire-Wise Landscaping

In fire country, established lavender is one of the faster shrubs to re-sprout after wildfire. Its low, open structure makes it useful in fire-risk landscapes.