



# Lavender Love Affair

By Marilyn Zink

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# How to Grow & Use Lavender

*By Marilyn Zink*

*Herbalist, Publisher of the Herbal Collective magazine*

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All photos by Marilyn Zink.

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## Introduction

# My Love Affair with Lavender

Ever have plant love?

Lavender was one of the first herb plants that I fell in love with. It's clean fresh aroma and lovely mauve flowers in late spring caused me to have a huge crush on the plant.

Lavender makes you think of summer - a fresh ocean breeze, clean sheets snapping on the line, the warm sun on your face - perhaps a gentle caress. Growing and using lavender has been a passion ever since.

While there are many flowering herbs, lavender is perhaps the most well known and the most popular.

Lavender makes an excellent border plant and grows well in pots too.

Initially I started with lavender in pots on a sunny spot, later moving plants to my herb garden.

My first herb garden was crescent shaped with all sorts of plants stuffed in it. While I enjoyed the plants, the lavender was lost in the garden.

That's when I discovered lavender stood out as a border plant and have been using it in borders ever since.

Lavender was grown as a border plant in the second herb garden in a location at our new home. The herb garden went down a slight slope ending in a huge teardrop shape at the bottom. A pathway took one down to the bottom and the pathway went around the teardrop shape.

Lavender was planted as a border around the edges of the teardrop and in the centre was an old concrete bird bath. I always like using a focal point for the garden and this was a good way to do it. The lavender looked and smelled wonderful blooming in the summer surrounded by the other herbs throughout the garden.

When we moved again, I planned another herb garden, once again using lavender as a border plant. My third herb garden was divided into five sections, with pathways leading to and around the lavender garden in the middle. The bird bath was again a focal point for the garden and the lavender looked stunning blooming in the summer.

On the fourth garden (yes, we moved quite a bit), the herb garden was designed as a half wagon wheel divided into four quadrants. The bird bath is at the end of the garden in the middle. Only this time I haven't planted lavender around it as it is mainly due to lack of sunlight. I planted pansies instead which are doing quite well in the location I've given them.

I may plant lavender around the outer rim of the wagon wheel but haven't decided yet. However, I haven't abandoned lavender as a border plant. Instead, I planted it in a border alongside the driveway interspersed with catmint.

Catmint is another herb with purple-mauve flowering spikes and works well growing with lavender. Catmint blooms all summer long so it will still be flowering long after lavender is finished. It also starts blooming in early spring and will be enjoyed sooner.

Catmint should not be confused with catnip. While they are from the same family, catmint is more of an ornamental herb. It has lavender blue flowers and grows quite vigorously, more so than the slower growing lavender.

I made sure to give lots of space between the plants but even so, cutting back the catmint might be a good idea to let the lavender shine.

So this gives you a good idea of how to grow lavender as a border plant or for hedging.

There are many different types of lavender available today – some bloom at different times, others are slightly earlier in spring while some are later.

I want to show you the different types of lavender, how to grow this lovely plant, harvest it and use it in many ways such as; crafts, bath and beauty products, foods and drinks as well as medicinal uses.

# Growing Lavender

Lavender is one of the ‘herbs de provence,’ or herbs of France where it is grown for distilling into essential oil. Lavender likes soil that has a neutral to alkaline ph, so the best ph level is between 6.5 and 8.5. The soil should be well draining and the plants grow best in full sun with good air circulation.

The plants prefer soil that is more sandy but will tolerate a wide range of soil conditions. It is critical to have good drainage.

Lavender does best grown from cuttings rather than seed. Lavender has tiny seeds with slow growing seedlings that can get easily choked by weeds. These seeds are best started indoors or on a warm west or south-facing windowsill. Lavender (along with rosemary) are two of the most difficult herbs to grow from seeds. They are slow to germinate over a period of several weeks requiring lots of patience.

So it's best to propagate from cuttings once you have a mother plant. One way to do this by bending down a small branch and covering the bottom part of the branch with dirt. It will send down roots and the new plant can be separated from the mother plant once it's established.



Another way is to take small cuttings from the mother plant and put them in water until small roots start to form. Then you can transplant it into pots or directly into the garden in spring or fall.

*Close-up of English lavender used in a grocery store landscape. (see next page)*

# Landscaping with Lavender

Lavender is being used a lot more in landscapes nowadays. Depending on the climate, lavender is grown in landscapes for grocery stores, banks, businesses or even gas stations.

Several types of lavender may be grown along with other plants or the landscape may feature more of Spanish lavender (the ones with the little 'bunny' ears petals) as this type blooms all summer long.

The gray green foliage of lavender and its purple blooms contrasts well with other plants often used in landscaping.

It works well in theme gardens for a Mediterranean theme or for those who like an old English country garden theme.

For a Mediterranean theme, consider growing lavender along with rosemary and basil, classic urns, statues and fountains, bay or scented geraniums and grapevines along fences.

For an old English country garden, grow lavender along with flowers like cosmos, fragrant geranium and roses and ornaments like a bird-bath, wrought iron and a sun dial or gazing ball.



*Lavender is used in many landscapes such as this one used at a grocery store parking lot.*

# Lavender in Containers

Lavender is a great plant and herb to grow in pots, particularly in areas that resemble a Mediterranean climate.

Herbs like lavender do well in the dry, warm and well aerated soils of containers. It's easy to move them around and you can plan an entire herb garden with containers alone.

You can place the container wherever you want to allow the herbs to get the most sun.

Plus, the scent from the lavender will be most enjoyed when it is grown in a container close to a patio chair or other outdoor seating area.

Terra cotta (fired clay) containers are the favourite types to grow herbs in as they lend a natural look and develop a nice patina with age.

Terra cotta strawberry jars are a great way to plant lavender in containers. The smaller types of lavender (see Lavender Types) work well for these types of containers.

For larger containers, the half whiskey barrels are a nice size as they hold about thirty gallons. This allows the opportunity to grow a couple lavender plants or different types of lavender for more enjoyment. Plus, these containers don't need to be watered as often as the smaller containers.



For larger containers that need to be moved, make sure you

*Lavender does well in pots. The lavender in this pot will outgrow it soon and need to be transplanted to a larger pot.*

put them on a movable base with wheels.

When selecting a container, keep in mind how much room the lavender plant will grow. Your container should be one half to one third the size of the herb plant at maturity.

It is better to pick a larger container and add bedding plants such as petunias than have one that is too small.

If the lavender is too large for its container, it will let you know by wilting severely in the afternoon sun. It may also blow over in a strong breeze.

The type of soil used in a container should be different than the soil used for the garden, which tends to be too dense and shrinks away from the sides of the container when dry.

To choose a potting soil, look for a 'professional' mix consisting of high-quality peat moss, perhaps a bit of Perlite and composted soil with pulverized pine or fir bark.

Heavy mixes that contain a lot of sand or water which is designed to increase their weight should be avoided, even though they appear to be good bargains. Your lavender will suffer for it.

Also avoid very black mixtures. Instead look for a mix with a bit of limestone and enough fertilizer to get plants off to a good start.

Any herb that is transplanted will have a delay in growth until it gets settled.

Add some pelleted dolomite limestone to the potting soil – usually about ¼ cup of lime to a gallon of soil.

Wait until the lavender has adjusted to add any fresh fertilizer that was not already in the mix. Avoid using dry chemical fertilizers in containers as these can burn the roots.

Use liquid fertilizer or make your own with herbs. This may be the low cost intensive method but it works.

Grow comfrey and use the leaves to make liquid fertilizer.

Grab a selection of leaves and steep them in a gallon of water in the

sun for several days.

Add more leaves as needed. Strain and pour the resulting liquid over your herbs.

You can keep topping up this organic liquid fertilizer and feed other herbs and plants in your garden.

You will need to feed herbs in containers more often than herbs in the ground, just as you will obviously need to water them more often.

Water container herbs long enough for the excess to pour out of the holes as this decreases the chance of fertilizer salts accumulating in the soil and injuring plant roots.

Feed your lavender with liquid fertilizer once every two weeks and observe the plants. A natural liquid fertilizer such as the one made from comfrey can be used once a week. Keep an eye on the plants to see how they respond.

*Spanish lavender, below, is popular in many gardens and landscapes as it has a longer blooming season.*



# Lavender Types

There are many different types of lavender to choose from these days and it can be a confusing process if one doesn't know what to look for.

There are four main types of lavender and under those headings are the more specific varieties.

The types and varieties people choose will depend on personal preference and the climate one lives in, as some lavender are less hardy.

The four main types are **English or Angustifolia lavender**, **French or Lavandin**, **Spanish or Stoechas** and **Hybrids or Lanata X Angustifolia**. The second names are the botanical names and these are the ones you should look for when purchasing lavender so you know exactly what you bought.

## English Lavender or Angustifolia

Most people are familiar with English lavender and that is often the one people start with, as it is the most common. The varieties of English lavender are Hidcote Blue, Hidcote Pink, Munstead, Jean Davis, Dwarf Blue, Twickle Purple, Betty's Blue, Royal Purple, Tucker's Early and Bowle's Early.

Hidcote lavender is slow growing and compact with dark purple flowers and small silver leaves.

## French Lavender or Lavandin X intermedia

French lavender is becoming more popular nowadays as more people become aware of it. These varieties include Grosso, Provence, Grappenhall, Nana Alba, Dutch, Old English, Hidcote Giant and Cascade Velvet.

Nana Alba has white flower spikes that 1 ½ -2 inches long with compact silver-gray foliage. The plant grows to a height of 12 inches.

## Spanish Lavender or Stoechas

Spanish lavender is a little less known but becoming more well known.

The most common variety is Otto Quast while other varieties are Lemon Viridis, Spanish Avenue, Peter's Pink, Marshwood, Evelyn Cadzow, Snowman, Helmsdale, Willowvale and Papillion.

The lavender *Stoechas pedunculata* variety is half-hardy with magenta pink flowers on purple bracts above gray-green leaves.

## Hybrids or *Lanata X Angustifolia*

The hybrids are less common and there are fewer varieties. These varieties include Woolly, Richard gray, Sawyers, Silver Frost and Goodwin Creek.

## Lavender Types by Color & Scent

You can also grow lavender by the colors you prefer.

Many people prefer the darker purple of the 'Hidcote' lavender while others like a paler color or prefer ones with a stronger scent.

### Richest purple

Many people prefer the dark purple of Hidcote lavender. It looks stunning in borders or in pots on its own. Here are some choices for rich purple Hidcote lavender as well as a few other rich purple lavenders.

- Lavandula angustifolia 'Hidcote'
- L. angustifolia Hidcote Superior'
- > angustifolia 'Imperial Gem'
- L. angustifolia Purple Bouquet'
- L. angustifolia 'Impress Purple'

### Darkest Blues

- L. angustifolia 'Betty's Blue'
- L. angustifolia 'Blue Cushion'
- L. angustifolia 'Violet Intrigue'

### Favorite Pinks

- L. angustifolia 'Coconut Ice'
- L. angustifolia Hidcote Pink'
- L. angustifolia 'Litle Lottie'
- L. angustifolia 'Melissa''
- L. angustifolia 'Miss Katherine'



## Best Lavender for Humid Summers

- Lavandula xchaytorae 'Ana Luisa'
- L. xchaytorae 'Kathleen Elizabeth'
- L. xintermedia 'Grosso'
- L. xintermedia 'Provence'
- L. stoechas 'Otto Quast'



## Best Cold-Weather Lavenders

- Lavandula angustifolia 'Buena Vista'
- L. angustifolia 'Folgate'
- L. angustifolia 'Imperial Gem'
- L. angustifolia 'Mailette'
- L. angustifolia 'Royal Velvet'

## Lavender with the Strongest Scent

- Lavandula xintermedia 'Fat Spike'
- L. xintermedia 'Grosso' (hybrid)
- L. xintermedia 'Hidcote Giant' (hybrid)
- L. xintermedia 'Impress Purple' (hybrid)
- L. xintermedia 'Provence' (hybrid)
- L. xintermedia 'Super' (hybrid)

# Harvesting

Harvesting lavender is one of the great joys of growing herbs. Blooming lavender looks wonderful and the aroma gets more intense as it dries.

Lavender has a compact habit and with its woody stems it can be pruned into a beautiful and fragrant hedge.

The smaller varieties such as *Lavandula angustifolia* Hidcote, which grows to 24 inch, makes a great hedge. Consider this before planting and pruning lavender.

Even if you don't have any plans for lavender and just want to enjoy it in the garden, it is a good idea to harvest the plants to prevent them from growing thin and straggly.

You can do this after flowering if you prefer and enjoy the blooming lavender in your garden. Who doesn't enjoy the blooms?

Growing lavender near a seat or bench is one of the great ways to enjoy its sight and scent while it is blooming.

You can grow all types of lavender in a pot so this is also an excellent way to enjoy the blooms. Be sure to choose a large enough pot for the lavender to have ample room to grow. Lavender dislikes being transplanted but it will come back slowly.

If you do intend to grow lavender for enjoying later for its aroma, choose a type like Twickel Purple as it is one of the most strongly scented lavenders.

So you could grown an *Angustifolia* to enjoy its blooms and harvest later. You could also grow a Twickel Purple to harvest soon after blooming for its strong aroma.

All types of lavender dry well and the aroma intensifies as it dries.

## When to Harvest

To harvest lavender, trim the stems right after it blooms.

Prune these stems at a notch just above the old growth – do not cut into the old growth.

Pick lavender on a sunny morning after the dew has evaporated and as

the buds are beginning to open.

This is the best time. If that time is not possible, prune the lavender in the late afternoon towards dusk after the heat of the day has dissipated but before the coolness of the evening arrives.

Avoid harvesting lavender in the heat of the day.

## To Dry

Collect small bunches and tie or use a rubber band to hold the stems together. Ensure the stems are long as this will make it easier to dry. The stems can be trimmed later as needed.

Hang upside down in a dark location that allows some air so the lavender dries properly. Keep away from heat and light. If you don't have a dark location, you may wish to tie the lavender and put it in a paper bag and also secure that before hanging upside down.

The bunches of lavender should hang freely. Remove bunches after two weeks when they are brittle dry.



*Dry lavender upside down in bunches and hang where the air moves freely.*

# Using Dried Lavender

Once the lavender has been harvested, there are many wonderful ways to use it.

You could use it as a simple bouquet in a vase or an old pitcher of stoneware for a classic look.

One does not need to grow lavender to appreciate it or use it. Dried herbs can be purchased in bulk from local health food stores or online.

Lavender is one of the top herbs used in beauty products and a common method is to use the herb with its essential oil. This enhances the scent and therapeutic properties and makes the product last longer.

## Lavender Products to Make

When you are making lavender products, use the best quality dried lavender buds available. Choose the lavender you want for the product you are making – for some products you may want more color than scent, such as soft soap. Lavender essential oil can always be added to enhance the scent.

This section covers lavender products like bath salts, soft soap, sleep pillows, sachets as well as creams and lotions

### Bath Salts

These can be made with Epsom salts and baking soda as well as the dried lavender buds.

1 cup Epsom salt  
½ cup baking soda  
½ cup dried lavender buds  
5-8 drops lavender essential oil

Mix the first 3 ingredients in a glass or plastic container (do not use metal). Add essential oils, mix again and store in a glass or plastic container with lid. Source dollar stores for containers.

## Soft Soap

To make a soft soap, first make a strong infusion of lavender. An infusion is like a strong tea as it needs to steep for 15-30 minutes. Use leftover bits of white soap or purchase a mild white soap ( such as Ivory or Dove) and cut it into small pieces. It is not necessary to use the whole bar for this purpose – ¼ to a ½ a bar should suffice.

### Lavender Infusion

¼ - ½ cup dried lavender buds, lightly crushed  
1 cup boiling water

Pour boiling water over herbs. Infuse for at least 30 minutes. The infusion will turn a bright purple and increase in color over time. Strain into blender.

To make soft soap – add liquid from infusion to blender and add soap pieces. Blend until liquefied.  
Pour into pump containers and place in bathrooms or give as a gift.

**Note:** If you have any leftover infusion or want some, make enough to have a double batch. The remaining infusion can be used to make cream or lotion (see next section).

## Cream & Lotions

Making creams and lotions with lavender is fun and useful. These home-made creams are healthier for the body without the chemicals used in commercial creams. Plus they make great gifts.

Fresh or dried lavender can be used. An infusion should be made first (see above).

You need cocoa butter, borax, beeswax, honey, olive oil or almond oil, rosewater, glycerine.

### Ingredients

2 Tbsp. cocoa butter  
2 Tbsp. beeswax  
1 tsp. borax  
2 tsp. honey

150 ml. good quality almond oil/olive oil  
150 ml. lavender infusion  
50 ml. rosewater  
50 ml. glycerine

Put oil into top of double boiler. Add beeswax and allow to melt slowly. Add cocoa butter and allow to melt. Add honey and blend in. Mix remaining ingredients except for lavender infusion in a separate non-metal container. Stir to dissolve borax. Stir carefully to blend all ingredients together. Now beat infusion into wax mixture with electric beater or wooden spoon. It will get thick and creamy as it the mixture cools. Pour cream into pots with screw top lids and label.

## **Sleep or Eye Pillows**

Lavender with its calming, soothing qualities makes a great candidate for sleep or eye pillows.

A sleep pillow is used next to a regular pillow to help induce sleep. It is a much smaller pillow and can be made using cotton or other natural fabric.

Cut fabric into desired shape and sew three ends together. Flip inside out and stuff with dried lavender or blend with other herbs such as dried valerian and chamomile, which are also calming herbs. Add a few drops of essential oil for a more powerful scent. Sew up remaining end and place next to pillow for a calming sleep. Or alternatively place pillow on eyes and relax the optic nerves for a restful sleep.

## **Sachets**

Sachets can be used to scent a home or a particular area of the home. They are often used in drawers to keep clothes fresh and repel insects. Sachets can be filled with dried lavender buds. Use a few drops of lavender essential oil to preserve the sachet longer.

Take sachets travelling with you to induce a calming restful scent wherever you are. As a side bonus, your luggage will smell lovely.

## **Neck or Tummy Pillows**

Lavender with its therapeutic qualities helps soothe and relax sore or cramped muscles. This makes it an excellent addition to neck pillows or a tummy pillow that women can use to ease menstrual cramps.

This is a long, sausage shaped pillow that should be able to fit in the microwave. Cut fabric to fit and fill with a mix of dried lavender buds and rice, flax seed, millet or barley. Flip inside out and finish the end. This pillow can be heated in the microwave for two minutes and soothe aching, sore or cramped muscles.

Those who are not sewers can likely find these type of pillows from local health food stores or online.

## **Lavender Spray**

Make your own lavender spray with essential oil and distilled water.

**Note:** Instead of plain distilled water, make an infusion by boiling the distilled water and pouring over dried or fresh lavender buds. Steep for 30 minutes to an hour, than strain and use.

1 cup distilled water

10-20 drops lavender essential oil

Pour into a spray bottle with a mist setting. Use as needed to spray body, pillows, bed linens, drawers or anywhere else yo want a fresh, clean lavender scent.

## **Lavender Hand or Foot Scrub**

A hand or foot scrub is a great way to enjoy the benefits of lavender and enjoy softer skin.

1 cup Epsom salt, coarse kosher salt, sea salt or sugar

¼ cup of dried lavender buds

½ cup olive oil, sweet almond oil or jojoba oil

8-10 drops lavender essential oil

Mix ingredients together and put in screw top jar with lid. Store in a cool, dark place. A bathroom cupboard is a great place as you will need to wash up after using.

Use a tablespoon or so and massage into rough areas such as feet and elbows. Rinse lightly to reduce any residue.

In a spice grinder or coffee grinder, chop the lavender until finely ground.

In a mixing bowl beat together, using an electric mixer, the cream cheese, butter and lavender for about a minute or until creamy.

Add the vanilla extract and mix until well blended. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a spatula as needed and slowly add the sugar, a little at a time, continuing to scrape down the sides of the bowl while mixing. Blend until the frosting is light and fluffy.

Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

## Lavender Lemonade

1 cup angustifolia lavender bud

2 cups boiling water

8 cups cold water

1 cup sugar or honey

1 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

Lavender sprigs for garnish

Pour 2 cups boiling water over the lavender bud and let steep for 8 to 10 minutes. Any longer will tend to make a bitter 'lavender tea.' Strain through a clean coffee filter into a big jug.

Add 8 cups of cold water, 1 cup of sugar or honey and 1 cup lemon juice, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Refrigerate until needed. Before serving, add slices of lemon and ice.

Use sprigs of lavender to garnish each drink – optional.

Recipe courtesy of [www.cowichanvalleylavender.com](http://www.cowichanvalleylavender.com)

## Creamy Lavender Vinaigrette

2/3 cup sour cream

1/3 cup rice wine vinegar

¼ cup lavender honey (Cowichan Valley)

1/3 cup olive oil or grape seed oil

1 tsp. lime or lemon juice

1 tsp. Herbes de Provence

1 ½ tsp. dried culinary lavender (ground to a fine powder in a coffee mill)

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# Cooking with Lavender

Cooking with lavender is become popular in recent years.

Lavender lends a delicate, subtle flavor to baked goods and is also a special treat in desserts and drinks.

Use the more mild flavoured lavender *angustifolia* in recipes and stay away from the strongly scented lavender.

## Lavender Scones

2 cups all-purpose flour

¼ cup white sugar

1 cup milk, soy milk or almond milk

2 ½ tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. lavender buds (*Angustifolia lavender*)

¼ cup butter

½ tsp. baking soda

½ tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Grease baking pan with margarine or butter. Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt together.

Cut in the margarine or butter until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the milk and mix to make a smooth dough (add more milk as needed).

Knead very lightly for 10 seconds on a lightly floured surface.

Roll or pat to about ¾" thick (2 cm) and cut into individual scones or wedges.

Bake for approximately 12 minutes.

Brush tops with melted butter after removing from the oven.

## Lavender Cream Cheese Frosting

1 cup powdered (confectioners) sugar

½ tsp. *Angustifolia Lavender*

1 pkg. (250 gm). Low-fat cream cheese

½ cup unsalted butter

1 tsp. vanilla extract

Blend all the ingredients together and store in an air tight container in the fridge until needed.

This vinaigrette is perfect on salads and a bit of tang from the lime brings out the lavender flavor.

Recipe courtesy of [www.cowichanvalleylavender.com](http://www.cowichanvalleylavender.com)



*Cowichan Valley Lavender Farm, above, is located in the Cowichan Valley on beautiful Vancouver Island, B.C.*

# Therapeutic Qualities

Lavender is very well known for its therapeutic qualities.

It is calming and relaxing so it's great for anger, anxiety, stress, irritability, insomnia and depression. It also works topically for muscle aches, cramps and spasms, digestive and wounds..

Lavender essential oil is great for the skin and helps heal the skin from burns as well as the itch and swelling associated with insect bites.

One of the best ways to experience lavender's therapeutic qualities is from lavender essential oil. The essential oil is complex, containing more than 150 healing compounds. Lavender essential oil is one of the only essential oils (other than tea tree) that can be applied directly to the skin. This makes it extra easy to use. When it's rubbed on the skin, the oil penetrates quickly and it can be detected in the blood in as little as five minutes.

So it's important to know that the essential oil is much more than a nice scent.

Fresh or dried lavender buds are another way to benefit from the healing benefits of lavender. Though you need far less of the essential oil to experience the benefits.

## Anxiety, Stress, Irritability

When our bodies get stressed or we get upset or irritable, our blood levels go up along with stress-related hormones. Studies done at the **Smell and Taste Research Foundation in Chicago** found that scents such as lavender increase the type of brain waves associated with relaxation.\*

It lends support to the practice of using lavender to treat emotions such as restlessness, anxiety and insomnia.

Researchers at a British hospital divided 90 patients in intensive care into three groups – one group received standard care, another group received standard care with plus up to three massages and the third group received standard care plus aromatherapy massages with lavender. The third group reported the greatest mood elevation and anxiety relief.

## Insomnia

Participants in a sleep study at the University of Leicester in England found that they slept longer and more soundly when they were exposed to the fragrance of lavender oil in the last two weeks of a six week study.

Some British hospitals offer lavender pillows or lavender baths to help patients sleep.

The German Commission E, the expert panel that evaluates herbal medicine, endorses lavender for treating insomnia as well as for anxiety and restlessness.

## Cramps, Spasms and Digestive Issues

Lavender helps calm the smooth muscles lining the digestive tract, similar to its botanical relatives in the mint family. The essential oil massaged onto the skin enters the blood stream and helps promote the secretion of bile, which in turn helps digest fats.

Lavender also soothes and relaxes the muscle that causes menstrual cramps – the uterus. Lavender oil can also be added to baths to relax spasms and cramping. Women who are recovering from childbirth may also find lavender useful for pain in the recovery area.

## Skin Treatment for Wounds and Burns

Lavender essential oil has anti-bacterial and anti-microbial actions that helps prevent infection and helps skin heal from wounds. The oil also helps skin heal from burns and insect bites.

Interestingly, aromatherapy was ‘born’ as a result of a accident that resulted in lavender oil being used.

French fragrance chemist Rene-Maurice Gattefosse was working in his laboratory in the 1920s and set off an explosion that burned his arm. He plunged his arm into the nearest cold liquid, which happened to be a bowl of lavender oil.

He felt surprising and immediate relief. The lavender oil helped the burn heal quickly with little pain and scarring.

As a result, Gattefosse spent the rest of his life studying the role of essential oils in health and healing. He published the book, *Aromatherapie* in 1928, which coined the term that now describes the healing effects of essential oils.

## Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is simply defined as “The use of aromatic plant extracts and essential oils in massage or baths.

Another definition puts it as ‘the therapeutic use of plant-derived, aromatic essential oils to promote physical and psychological well-being. It is sometimes used in combination with massage and other therapeutic techniques as part of a holistic treatment approach.\*

So lavender essential oil accomplishes that end. The best quality oil is extracted from lavender angustifolia and lavender stoechas.

**Note:** Do not ingest lavender essential oil. It should only be used topically (massage on skin), inhaled or in baths.

Like other herbs, a large amount of lavender is used to produce a small amount of essential oil. This accounts for why essential oil can be expensive for a small bottle. Lavender is not as expensive as other essential oils and keep in mind that a little goes a long way.

Essential oils are steam distilled through a process that uses a still. Only the very tiny molecules from the plant evaporate and this is what makes the essential oil. When plant matter is heated in the still, the essential oils are freed and evaporate as molecules into the steam. The molecules go through a cooling coil from the still and what results is aromatic water and essential oil.



*Christopher Carruthers of the Cowichan Valley Lavender Farm, above, adjusts an old-fashioned still.*

# History and Folklore

There is a great deal of wonderful history and folklore associated with lavender.

The Bible refers to lavender as spikenard, due to the spikes on which the lavender flowers form. The ancient Greeks called the plant nard, as lavender grew prolifically around the ancient Syrian city of Nardus, near the Euphrates River.

In the Middle Ages sprinkling lavender on a lover's head was believed to keep the person faithful. This alleged effect caused great demand for the herb.

The monks grew lavender in their knot gardens – where beds were designed in a geometric pattern bordered by low hedges.

Another practice that caused demand for the herb and drove up the price was a persistent rumour, apparently spread by herbalists, that the asp, a poisonous snake, nested in lavender bushes. This made people think twice about gathering the herb and likely made it easier for the herbalists to gather as much as they want and charge more for it.

Lavender's mood altering effects made it a popular anti-depressant and it has been used to aid sleep and as a tranquilizer for anxious, restless or emotionally troubled people since ancient times.

Lavender spikes were worn under the hats of English farmers to prevent headaches and sunstroke. Lavender was used in sachets and potpourris for centuries to freshen the air, especially in sickrooms.

British herbalist Nicholas Culpeper prescribed and wrote of lavender as useful for “all the grief and pains of the head...it strengthens the stomach...two spoonfuls of the distilled water of the flowers help them that have lost their voice...”\*

Up and until the First World War, lavender infusions and tinctures were still used to disinfect and treat wounds.

Today we benefit from lavender's great healing history, using a combination of old time wisdom and new technology.

# Lavender and Other Plants

## Catmint

Catmint is the perfect foil to lavender as it also has purple mauve flowers. The only difference is that catmint blooms all summer and lavender is pretty much finished by the end of July, early August, unless you grow Spanish lavender, which tends to flower all summer.

Lavender is more of a compact shrub while catmint can get a little leggy. If it gets too leggy, simply trim it back. Catmint also can grow quite wide and up to three feet high.

Flowering catmint makes a stunning border plant with its purple blooms that attract bees. Lavender is best planted as a border in front of catmint, so even when the lavender is finished blooming the catmint flowers will still be enjoyed.

## Peonies and Roses

Rose are another great plant to grow alongside lavender. As lavender is reputed for repelling insects, it can help prevent the aphids that often collect on rose and peonies. The gray-green foliage and purple blooms of lavender make it a nice color counterpart to the pinks and reds of peonies and roses.

## References

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# About the Author



Marilyn Zink is an accomplished author, a journalist, herbalist and publisher of The Herbal Collective magazine. She enjoys growing up to 50 different types of herbs including lavender and using herbs in her daily life.

She lives in Nanaimo, B.C. with her husband and two children. In her spare time she enjoys sailing and kayaking.

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