



*L. angustifolia* ‘Hidcote’

## Quick Facts....

Select a site in full sun with well-drained soil. Lavender prefers a lean, slightly alkaline soil.

Lavender is drought tolerant and will suffer with too much water.

Hardy lavender varieties thrive in Colorado’s USDA Hardiness Zones 5 through 7.

Lavender comes in a variety of colors including white, yellow, pink, blue, violet and all shades of purple.

Harvest flowers before they have fully opened for the best results when drying.



Various colors of Lavender

Photo courtesy of Sequim Lavender Festival – Don Paulson

# Herbs

## Growing Lavender in Colorado

By K. A. Kimbrough and C. E. Swift<sup>1</sup>

Prized for its perfume, medicinal properties and beautiful color, lavender has been one of the most popular herbs for centuries. Lavender’s versatility has made it a must have plant for households across the world. Explorers brought lavender with them to America in the 1700’s. Lavender was planted in the kitchen gardens of New England and worked its way to the Spanish missions of California. Lavender essential oil has been used since Biblical times and was considered a measure of wealth.

It is often said that the English word *lavender* comes from the Latin *lavare*, “to wash” and that the Roman use of the herb brought about its usage in the laundry and linen drawers. However, it is not known whether lavender was brought to England by the Roman conquerors or by European traders. One of England’s lavender aficionados, Sally Festing, makes a strong case that the word *lavender* comes from the earliest spelled form *livendula* – Latin for “livid” or “bluish.”

### Uses of Lavender

Today, we value lavender for its many uses including aromatherapy, culinary and medicinal purposes, and adding unsurpassed beauty and fragrance to our gardens. Lavender buds and flowers are made into potpourri, spice mixtures, fresh bundles and wreaths. Essential oils and hydrosols are used in lotions, perfumes, soaps and candles.

### Lavender around the World

Lavender originated in the Mediterranean region of Europe. Today, lavender is grown around the world where the climate conditions are similar. Major commercial growing areas are located in France, England, New Zealand and Australia. Here in North America, lavender is grown as a cash crop in Washington State, New Mexico and Texas.

## Selecting Plants

Lavender is a semi-woody perennial sub-shrub. It's grey to green foliage stays evergreen throughout the year. As a member of the plant family of mints, it has square stems and distinctive fragrances. Pruning the lavender plant after it blooms, including approximately 1/3 of the foliage, will keep the plant from getting too woody.

There are two types of lavenders that grow well in this area. The first one is *Lavandula angustifolia* or English lavender. It is hardy to Zone 5 and often blooms twice in one season. There are hundreds of varieties of English lavender available depending on the color and size of plant you are looking for. The other type of lavender is a hybrid of *L. angustifolia* and *L. latifolia*. It is commonly referred to as a Lavandin. Lavandins are generally larger plants, they bloom later in the summer and only once and produce sterile seed. The Lavandins produce larger quantities of essential oil but not as high quality as the English lavenders. Both types of lavenders have a place in landscapes and as a cash crop. In this fact sheet, the word lavender will refer to both types of lavenders.

If planting *angustifolia* or its cultivars, be sure nursery stock has been propagated vegetatively from cuttings, not started from seed. English Lavenders do not always come true from seed and you could have highly variable characteristics like height, width, color and bloom time. Lavandins are sterile and can only be propagated vegetatively.



Photo courtesy of K. Kimbrough

The picture on the left is the lavandin 'Provence'. The picture on the right shows how much taller the lavandin varieties are than English. The tall white lavandin in the background is 'White Grosso'. In front of it are the English varieties 'Goldberg' and 'Mitcham Grey'.



Photo Courtesy of K. Kimbrough

## Planting Lavender

Lavender can be planted from spring through fall in Western Colorado. Research has shown that fall-planted lavender survives better, establishes more quickly, and produces more flowers the following season.

Heavy soils may need to be amended prior to planting to insure good drainage. When planting lavender as a crop, spacing depends on the size of the cultivars and range from 2-3 feet within the row and 3-6 feet between the rows. Lavender is not competitive and does not respond well to weed pressure. If growing lavender in a field, weed cloth is highly recommended.

Even though lavender is drought tolerant, optimum establishment and maximum production will be obtained with adequate watering. Irrigation amounts and scheduling will vary according to soil type, climatic zone, and weather patterns. In general, water once or twice a week immediately after planting, until plants are established. Water mature plants every 2-3 weeks until bud formation then once or twice weekly until harvest.

The use of landscape fabric will cut down water requirements significantly. Apply mulch over the fabric. The root zone should not be allowed to dry out during dormancy.

## Propagation

The best time to take cuttings from lavender plants is right after they have bloomed. Take cuttings from stems with no buds on them. Remove leaves from the bottom half of the cutting and insert into well draining potting soil. Rooting hormones are not necessary. Be sure the label and date your cuttings. Water well and mist regularly. They should “take” in about 3 weeks. This is the time you would transplant the cutting into a larger pot, maybe a 3 ½” size.

## Pruning and Harvesting Lavender

Lavender is an herb and responds well to pruning. It flowers on new growth so plants should be pruned every year after it’s established. The difference between harvesting and pruning is 2-3 inches. Harvesting should take place when approximately 50% of the flower buds have opened in the summer and should include just the flower wand. Pruning should take place in April when green leaves start to emerge from the base of the plant and should include approximately 1/3 of the top growth of foliage. This pruning keeps the plant from splitting open and becoming too woody.



*Photo courtesy of Lavender Wind Farm*



*Photo courtesy of Lavender Wind Farm*

These pictures show harvesting and drying techniques. Dry harvested lavender in a cool, dark place in bundles of 50-100 stems. Secure the stems with a rubber band because it will contract when the stems dry out.

## Pest and Disease Problems

Lavender has very few pest or disease problems, but it is susceptible to soil diseases such as Phytophthora, the leaf disease Alfalfa Mosaic Virus (AMV), and possibly tobacco mosaic virus. Do not over-water or allow standing water around plants. Heavy infestations of grasshoppers can reduce yields but will probably not kill plants outright. Deer or elk may be a problem in some areas, browsing or trampling plants.

## Recommended Varieties

Name	Height	Width	Zone	Flower color/comments
<b>Lavandula angustifolia</b>				
Betty Blue	24"	24"	5	Dark purple
Blue Cushion	16"	16"	5	Deep blue
Buena Vista	18-24"	18"	5	Bi-color deep purple & dark blue
Coconut Ice	16-18"	18"	6	White and pink
Hidcote	12-16"	18"	5	Deep violet blue
Hidcote Superior	16"	18"	5	Deep violet blue
Hidcote Pink	18"	24"	5	Light pink
Jean Davis	18-24"	24"	5	Light pink
Lady	16"	18"	5	Soft blue/ true from seed
Lavance	10"	18"	5	Purple
Miss Katherine	24"	24"	6	Pink
Mitcham Grey	20"	20"	5	Deep violet blue
Munstead	12-18"	18"	5	Lavender blue/highly variable
Nana	10"	16"	5	Blue
Premier	24"	24"	5	Dark purple
Royal Velvet	24-36"	24"	5	Dk. navy blue/lavender/blooms 2x yr.
Sarah	12-18"	18-24"	5	Deep lavender
Sharon Roberts	24-30"	24"	5	Bi-color deep lavender & dark blue
Thumbelina Leigh	12-15"	18"	5	Deep purple and blue
Twickle Purple	18-24"	24"	5	Deep purple
<b>Lavandula x intermedia</b>				
Alba	24"	24"	6	White
Dilly Dilly	18"	24"	6	Violet blue
Dutchmill	24"	24"	6	Deep violet blue
England	15-18"	18"	6	Dark blue
Fred Boutin	30"	36"	6	Violet
Grappenhall	36-48"	36"	6	Light lavender
Grosso	30"	24-30"	5	Dark lavender blue
Hidcote Giant	30-36"	24"	6	Light Blue
Provence	30"	24"	6	Lavender blue
Silver Frost	24-36"	36"	6	True blue flowers/silver foliage
Super	36"	36"	6	Violet

## Useful Reference Books and Articles

The Genus Lavandula - Tim Upson & Susyn Andrews, 2004

Lavender, the Growers Guide – Virginia McNaughton, 2000

The Lavender Garden – Beautiful Varieties to Grow and Gather - Robert Kourik, 1998

Lavender – Tessa Eveleigh, 2002

Growing & Marketing Lavender – Curtis Beus, Washington State University Extension, June 2006

<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/lavender.pdf>

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