



heaven scent

Add a lavender shrub to your garden for a splash of eye-catching colour and the aroma of sweet perfume



at a glance

Common name
lavender

Botanical name
Lavandula spp.

Plant type
shrub

↑ 1.5m ↔ 1.5m

☀ full sun (at least 6 hours)

🌿 spring or autumn

🏠 compact varieties are ideal for pots

■ suitable

Like most people, I'm unable to walk past a lavender (*Lavandula* spp.) bush without picking a sprig and crushing it lightly to release its sweet and spicy perfume. For me, the scent evokes memories of lavender posies plucked from Mum's rambling garden as gifts for Grandma. I'd like to say that they were gifts of love, but I think the motivation was more likely a reward from her biscuit barrel!

I'm not alone in my love for this perfumed shrub, which produces one of the most recognised scents in the world. As well as being an easy-care garden plant, lavender is used in cosmetics, herbal preparations and even flavouring for foods.

I grow lavender at home so I can pick the flower spikes for informal floral arrangements, or dry them for potpourri sachets, and I really enjoy the way their fragrance wafts in the garden after rain. Flowers are usually a shade of lavender-purple, but they can also be white, pink or green and the leaves, which

are usually narrow and silver-grey or green-grey, provide foliage contrast. If that's not enough reason to find it a place in the garden, you can rub the leaves on insect bites to take out the sting, and the fragrance is said to aid sleep, promote relaxation and relieve headaches.

varieties of lavender

There is a lavender for most sunny situations. Using a range of lavender forms and colours creates a relaxed country ambiance, while a display of one variety planted as a hedge (French lavender is one of the best for this), topiarised or massed in a garden bed adds a more formal structure to the garden. Dwarf English lavenders and compact Australian-bred lavenders are perfect for pots and make good low edging.

Lavender is a water miser once established, and a beloved plant in cottage gardens where it teams well with roses and ▶

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looks good with other sun-loving Mediterranean plants. Plant it with pelargonium, rosemary, rock-rose (*Cistus*), pride of Madeira (*Echium*), bearded iris and salvia, all of which originated in a climate with hot, dry summers and wet winters.

That's not to say lavender is a perfect plant as it will turn up its toes without perfect drainage and needs regular pruning by half to two-thirds to slow down its tendency to get 'woody' at the base. Once woody, it's impossible to return the plant to its youthful appearance, as pruning into the dead wood usually kills it. While commercial growers keep plants for a decade or more, gardeners should replace theirs every four or five years and trim back flowers regularly to encourage a new flower flush.

If I'm feeling thrifty, I make cuttings by removing 5cm-lengths of these woody stems, keeping a little foliage on top. Abrade the stem at the base by scraping it with the edge of the secateurs to expose the green inner part, and pop them into damp sand. Propagation can also be done with semi-ripe, non-flowering stems from mid-summer to early autumn, and tip-cuttings in spring.

Lavender has been around for thousands of years with the Egyptians using the scented oil in embalming, and the Romans perfuming their bathhouses with the fragrance. The word lavender is derived from the Latin 'lavare', which means to wash, as clothes were dried over lavender bushes so the aromatic oils in the leaves and flowers scented the cloth. The scent differs between species and ranges from the sweet fragrance in English lavender, which is used in cosmetics and perfume, to the more lavender-camphor smell of the French and Italian varieties, which are used in cleaning products.

where to grow lavender

It's a very easy and drought-tolerant plant to grow in the southern areas of Australia, and it thrives in coastal situations. Some varieties are a challenge in humid areas but French lavender (*L. dentata*), Spanish/Italian lavender (*L. stoechas*) and varieties bred from them cope well with humidity if provided with good air circulation and gravel mulches. However, gardeners in the tropics should buy lavender plants during the dry season and treat them as a temporary potted plant.

Lavender prefers sun for most of the day, perfect drainage and alkaline soils. Incorporate some dolomite lime into acid soils before planting and provide slow-release fertiliser each spring. Do not mulch around the plants with organic materials as they maintain moisture around the trunk and lower branches.

Trim back English and Italian lavender in summer, and French lavender in autumn. Plants are moderately wind hardy and most species tolerate frost. With a little care, and the right conditions, lavender will grow happily in your garden, its fragrant flowers creating a collection of treasured memories, just like mine. **GA**

Hot Tip
Make a lavender oil for baths by filling a jar with flowers, topping it up with light olive oil and leaving it on a sunny windowsill for a few weeks so the scent is absorbed by the oil. Then strain into a clean bottle to keep in the bathroom.



Main lavender types grown in Australia

- English lavender** (*L. angustifolia*)
Produces sweet oil and is the only variety suitable for cooking. Popular varieties include 'Munstead Dwarf' and 'Hidcote'. Flowers spring to summer. ↑ 20cm–1m ↔ 20–80cm ☁️ 🪴
- Italian or Spanish lavender** (*L. stoechas*)
This species has two coloured 'wings' at the top of each flower. It's a weed in some areas of Australia. There are many subspecies and hundreds of cultivars. Flowers spring to summer. ↑ 30–80cm ↔ 30–80cm ☁️ 🪴
- French lavender** (*L. dentata*)
A bigger shrub with serrated leaves and a flat purple flower. *L. dentata* var. *dentata* has grey-green foliage and *L. dentata* var. *candicans* is a silver-grey form. Other varieties include 'Ploughman's Blue' and 'Royal Crown'. Flowers all year round. ↑ 70cm–1.2m ↔ 70cm–1m ☁️ 🪴
- Butterfly lavender** (*L. pedunculata*)
Long stems with up to 25cm between the foliage and the flower heads. Cultivars include 'Avonview' and 'Ploughman's Purple'. Flowers spring to summer. ↑ 50cm–1m ↔ 50cm–1m ☁️ 🪴
- Fern leaf types** (*L. canariensis*, *L. multifida* and *L. pinnata* 'Sidonie')
Winged flower spikes and a cedar or pine perfume. These varieties flower all year round. ↑ 50cm–1.3m ↔ 50cm–1.5m ☁️ 🪴

Key

- ↑ height
- ↔ width
- ☁️ suits humid climates
- 🪴 suitable for pots



top 5 local lavenders

- These newer forms have been bred in Australia and New Zealand for outstanding flower colour, form and disease-resistance. Most are compact, making them ideal for pots.
- 1. Lavender Lace collection**
Tufted flowers sit high above grey foliage. Flowers winter to spring. ↑ 70cm ↔ 70cm ☁️ 🪴
 - 2. 'The Princess' Lavender** (*L. pedunculata*)
Hot pink flowers held above the foliage. The 2014 Australian Plant of the Year. Flowers spring to summer. ↑ 70cm ↔ 70cm ☁️ 🪴
 - 3. 'With Love' Lavender** (*L. pedunculata*)
Pink flowers held close to the grey-green foliage. Flowers all year round. ↑ 60cm ↔ 60cm ☁️ 🪴
 - 4. 'Pukehou' Lavender** (*L. pedunculata*)
A New Zealand-bred variety. Up to five showy bracts on each purple flower. Humidity tolerant. Flowers winter to summer. ↑ 80cm ↔ 80cm ☁️ 🪴
 - 5. 'Ruffles' Lavender** (*L. pedunculata*)
Ruffled bracts on flowers held close to the foliage. Flowers in spring. ↑ 60cm ↔ 80cm ☁️ 🪴



Pick of the bunch for craft

Lavandin (*L. x intermedia*): A natural hybrid between *L. latifolia* and *L. angustifolia* grown for oil production. Flower stalks are long, about two-thirds of the plant height, making it good for craft and as a cut flower. 'Grosso' is a popular oil producer. Flowers in summer. ↑ 1–1.5m ↔ 1–1.5m

where to buy

Lavender is available at garden centres and nurseries. Find unusual or rarer varieties at plant fairs.



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