



Growing Lavender In the NC Piedmont

You love lavender. Who doesn't love the amazing fragrance, the beautiful purple flower spikes, and the bees buzzing happily over it? But, you live in the Southeast. Lavender isn't from the Southeast and it struggles in the humid climate, high night temperatures, and heavy, acidic soils.

You really want to grow lavender? Then get ready to do some soil preparation or grow it in containers. Here is a guide, developed from information provided by Sunshine Lavender Farm in Hurdle Mills, NC.

Remember: "Hot, Dry, and High". Full sun, an area that drains well, planted above the soil grade in prepared soil or in a container or raised bed.

LIGHT: Plant in a southwestern exposure with as much sun as possible. At least 6 hours of direct sun are required.

AIR CIRCULATION: Most lavender will get up to 3 feet wide. Make sure to plant with enough room around the plant for it to grow without being crowded. Usually, this means planting about 5-6 feet apart.

EXCELLENT DRAINAGE/SOILS: Plants must be grown where they will not sit in damp soil or with water for prolonged periods in the root zone. Sloped areas or high spots are best. Or, plant in containers or raised beds. Soil should have low fertility and be alkaline with a pH of 6.5 or higher.

PLANTING: Materials Needed: agricultural lime, bone meal, composted/bagged manure, 1" round stone. Most of us don't have the sandy/loam or gravelly soil needed to grow lavender. If you have clay, amend it as follows. Water your plant(s) at least an hour before planting. Create an 18-24" mound with well-cultivated (churned up and loosened) soil and 2 heaping shovelfuls of 1" round stone worked into the mound. Better to have too much stone than too little. If you know how to install a French drain, you can also install one under the planting area before amending the soil. Us-

ing a trowel, dig a hole just deep enough for the plant. Combine equal parts bone meal, lime, and well-composted (bagged) manure. You will need 1/2 cup of this mix per plant. After mixing, add the 1/2 cup of mix to the bottom of the planting hole and mix well. Loosen the roots of the plant to help them grow outwards. Place the plant in the hole and gather the soil mix around it. Water deeply and fill any low spots.

Note: Lavender blooms at its peak in its third year. The best time of year to plant lavender is March - June and September - October.

MULCH: Do not use wood or bark-based mulches. Instead use a light-colored reflective mulch such as light-colored gravel, pebbles, or seashells. This will help protect roots without retaining too much moisture around the plant.

PRUNING: Prune lavender in mid to late February, after the coldest part of winter. You can cut it back fairly hard, but leave 2-3 inches of soft green wood. Do not cut into the older, hardwood as there may not be dormant growth buds there. Pruning helps keep the plant compact and bushy.

HARVESTING/CUTTING: Cut lavender flowers in the morning and when the bottom flowers on the spike are just opening and make the cut right where the main foliage starts. **To enjoy them in a vase, do NOT put them in water.** They will do better without it. To dry lavender, gather a handful of stems, up to 100 or so, rubber band them to together and hang them upside down in a hot, dark, dry location such as an attic, storage area, or closet for 10-14 days. Cutting flowers will encourage a small round of fall bloom.

WATERING: Lavender should be watered regularly, about every 7-10 days (unless 1" or more of



rain is received that week), until well-rooted, through the growing seasons of the first two years. Once established, it is tolerant of heat and dry spells and will probably only need to be watered during drought. Overwatering will lead to root rot.

FERTILIZING: Toss a handful of bonemeal/lime/compost blend (equal parts) around the base of the plant in fall and water in.

GROWING IN CONTAINERS: Select a container with an opening of about 14-16" to provide enough room. The potting mix should have perlite and or sand in it to facilitate drainage. Mix in 1 tablespoon of lime to the potting mix after you have filled the pot with it. Set the lavender plant in the pot and make sure that the rootball does not sit below the soil mix once the pot is filled. Water in deeply and check the soil levels. Finish with a mulch of white landscaping pebbles or light-colored gravel.

In containers, lavender will need to be watered regularly when the soil feels dry and during the growing season and fertilized in spring with a slow-release, organic fertilizer or alfalfa pellets.

In winter: move the pot to a protected location against a wall, or sink it into the ground, or surround the pot with bagged mulch or pine straw bales (then use them next spring!) On nights below 32 degrees, put a blanket over the plant.

Bloom times (general):

First, let us say that the common names (English, French, Spanish etc) for lavender are often confused and used incorrectly. We are grouping these mainly for convenience not total accuracy.

Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas* i.e. 'Otto Quast', 'Kew Red', 'Anouk', Ruffles series,) - Blooms first of the different types of lavender. Has showy, 4-sided, dark violet-purple blooms. It is not as winter hardy and often does not come through our winters but is more heat and humidity tolerant than many other lavenders.

English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* i.e. 'Hidcote', 'Munstead', 'Jean Davis', 'Lady', Ellagance Purple,) - Blooms after Spanish lavender, around Memorial Day, but before French lavender. Generally, not as heat tolerant.

English lavender hybrids (*Lavandula x intermedia* i.e. 'Provence', 'Dutch', 'Fred Boutin', 'Alba', 'Dilly Dilly', 'Grosso', 'Phenomenal') - These varieties typically bloom in early to mid June and are good for hedges.

Sizes, Colors, & Other Details:

Anouk - (Spanish) Spreading habit growing 2' tall and up to 6' wide. Purple flower spikes topped with bright violet colored bracts over gray foliage.

Dilly Dilly - (English hybrid) Compact, long-blooming with violet-blue flower spikes. 12-14" tall by 18-24" wide.

Dutch - (English hybrid) Vibrant grape purple, lighter than dark varieties forming a mound of gray foliage 3' tall and about 2 1/2' wide. 2-3" flowers spikes are deep blue-violet.

Ellagance Purple - (English) - Improved series featuring bushy, uniform plants and prolific flowers. Low growing to 10-12-14" tall and 1-12" wide.

Fred Boutin - (English hybrid) Extra long flower spikes, very silvery foliage, medium lavender-blue flowers, late blooming. (mid-summer).

Goodwin Creek Gray - (hybrid) Deep violet-blue flowers. 24-36" tall and wide. Dense, silvery foliage attractively serrated at the tips. Vigorous in the Piedmont.

Grosso - (English hybrid) Larger, growing French hybrid to 36" tall and wide. Long flower spikes with dark purple flowers in mid-summer. Cold hardy to zone 6 with good drainage.

Hidcote - (English) 24" tall x 30" wide, dark purple flowers, one of the strongest-scented varieties. Blooms around Memorial Day.

Kew Red - (Spanish) Unusual reddish-violet flowers with pink bracts and gray green foliage. 36" tall and wide.

Jean Davis - (English) Compact habit to 18" tall, pale pink flowers, fruity flavor.

Lady - (English) Deep lavender-blue, gray-green foliage, AAS Winner, dwarf variety that grows to 12" tall.

Munstead - (English) Some of the best heat tolerance for English lavenders, violet-purple flowers, silvery foliage, known for strong fragrance. 18" tall x 24" wide,

Otto Quast - (Spanish) Showy dark violet-purple bracts held above the flower spike. Blooms early in the season. Grows 20"-24" tall and 2'-3' wide.

Phenomenal - (English hybrid) Named Phenomenal for a reason, this lavender receives great reviews from professional and amateur growers. One of the most cold hardy lavenders while also showing tolerance to extreme heat and humidity. Silvery foliage, and large 5" purple flower spikes. 24" tall by 24-32" wide. Blooms mid-June.

Provence - (English hybrid) Very long, dense and full flower spikes, light lavender blue, milder and sweeter fragrance than many other lavenders. 30" tall by 36"