

RELEASE FOR: October 27, 2007

Lavender creates beauty and fragrance in your landscape

By Laura Murphy

If you think you just might like a plant that loves heat, tolerates drought, thrives in gravelly soil, and is beautiful and fragrant, then lavender is for you!

Lavender is one of the best adapted plants for desert landscapes. In its native environment from the coastal to inland hillsides along the Mediterranean, lavender thrives in rocky, gravelly, alkaline soils very similar to ours here in the desert. It flourishes in full sun and heat, and once established, needs only occasional watering.



Lavenders flower in shades of blue, lavender and purple. There are also white flowering cultivars. Most have gray green to silver green foliage that blends well with a variety of herbs, perennials and desert shrubs. Some 25 species of lavender are known. However, the most commonly cultivated are Spanish, English, French and Lavandin, a cross between English and Spike lavender.

Spanish Lavender (*Lavendula stoechas*), probably provides the best show of color for desert landscapes. Lavender-purple flowers blanket gray-green foliage in early to mid-spring. Scattered flowering continues through early summer. Unlike the elongated bloom spikes of most lavender, this

one has short, squat flower heads. Showy purple bracts, resembling bunny ears, sprout out from the top of these dark blue heads. Spanish lavender grows low and wide, 2 feet high and 3 feet across.

Some varieties of note include the white flowering *L. stoechas* 'Spanish White', and 'Willow Dale', with narrow steely-blue leaves, and violet bracts atop dark-maroon flower heads.

French Lavender (*L. dentata*) is similar to Spanish in that it has pairs of colorful purple bracts which protrude from the tops of short flower spikes. This is probably the longest blooming of the lavenders. Flowers appear in early spring and blooming continues through the warm season, especially if care is taken to remove fading flower spikes. Leaves are gray-green, with distinctive square-toothed edges giving rise to the name 'dentata'. Plants range in size from 2 to 3 feet high and wide.

English Lavender (*L. angustifolia*) offers a large selection of cultivated varieties. Although it's not actually from England, but from northeast Spain, it is the most cold hardy lavender and can be grown at higher elevations in Arizona. Flower spikes are up to 4 inches long, very fragrant, and are used fresh cut or dried. English lavender flowers late spring to mid-summer, and randomly after that. Depending on the variety, plants range from 8 inches to 2 feet in height and have white, blue, and various shades of purple.

Some varieties of note include 'Nana' a dwarf variety with blue flower spikes above dense silvery-green foliage and 'Graves', with long lavender-blue flower spikes set on 2 feet tall and wide gray-green foliaged plants.

Lavandin (*L. x intermedia*) is the type of lavender most commonly grown commercially and used as a fragrance in everything from soaps to perfume. It's a cross between English and Spike lavender and retains most of the cold hardiness of its 'English' parent. Flower spikes range in color from dark violet-blue to white depending on the variety. Unlike other lavenders, the flower spikes of Lavandin are branched; a distinguishing characteristic. Plants are tall and broadly spreading to 2 to 3 feet.

Varieties of note include 'Grasso', with violet-blue flowers probably the most fragrant of the Lavandins and 'Provence', with light purple flowers excellent for drying and using as potpourri.

Lavenders need excellent drainage and are well-suited to growing in the gravelly soils of the foothills. Lavenders are also excellent for growing in pots. In the ground, water lavenders daily after planting until the roots get established. Then reduce the frequency of watering to once weekly in hot weather. If lower leaves yellow it's an indication that the plant is getting too much water. Lavenders grown in containers need well-drained soil and watering on a daily basis when temperatures exceed 90 degrees.

To keep plants blooming, harvest the flower spikes regularly and occasionally trim plants back lightly to stimulate additional flowering. If woody portions develop, prune out some of the older stems. Lavender needs little or no fertilization. A monthly application of a water-soluble plant food during spring and summer will suffice.

Mark your calendars for next Saturday. The Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners will be hosting their annual Meet the Master Gardener Day at the Library. There will also be workshops running concurrently. Bring your questions and problems and the Master Gardeners will help you find solutions.

Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. Information for this article from John Begeman of the University of Arizona. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105 or visit us at Home Garden Day from 11 am to 1 pm the first Tuesday of every month at the Library.

**CONTACT: VICKI COOMBS
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MOHAVE COUNTY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
101 E BEALE ST STE A
KINGMAN AZ 86401-5808
928 753-3788/928 753-1665 (FAX)
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu**

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.