

As Much As You May Be Tempted, Hold Off On Pruning Lavender Until Spring

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 24, 2017

Q. My lavender bushes are looking rather ragged. Should I prune now so they will look good next year?

A. Unpruned lavenders tend to become woody and have decreased blooms. However, lavender should not be pruned during the winter.

Unlike many perennial plants and shrubs that can be pruned now, it is best to wait to prune lavender until after bloom in spring or in early fall before any danger of frost. Pruning now can cause dieback that may kill the plant. Regular pruning is essential to keeping the bush looking healthy and vigorous, however, the amount and timing of the pruning is important.

The variety of lavender will determine how much you can prune off the lavender bush without damaging it. The most common lavender varieties I see growing around Redding area are Spanish (*lavandula stoechas*) English (*lavandula angustifolia*) and some of the hybrid crosses (*lavandula x intermedia*).

The Spanish varieties can be pruned by as much as a half but be sure to leave non-woody stems and green leaves. If you cut back too far, you can kill the plant. These are best pruned right after bloom in late spring.

The English and hybrid crosses should only be pruned back about one third in size and can either be pruned right after bloom or in the early fall. If you prune right after bloom you may get a second bloom later in the season and the lavender should be pruned again after the second bloom.



Lavender blooms. (Photo: William Archie, Detroit Free Press)

If your lavender bush is looking ragged, it may not have been pruned for a few years. If it is several years old and has never been pruned, it may not survive heavy pruning. You may be better off to replacing the bush. But if there is green growth just above the woody stems, start with light pruning to encourage lower growth, and then prune a little heavier each year. Try to cut as close to the woody stems as possible, to stimulate new growth, but not into them, as that may kill the bush. This may work better with some varieties than others, so you'll just have to experiment.

If the lavender flowers were not removed after bloom you can cut them off now as long as there is no chance of rain for a few days. This will help simulate more blooms this spring.

Lavender is an easy and mostly pest free small shrub that is a nice addition to the landscape. The Spanish variety is very drought tolerant and is a good plant for attracting beneficial insects to the landscape or garden. The flowers of the English and hybrid varieties can be used in cooking, flower arrangements and making many lavender scented products such as wands and sachets.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.