

## Perplexed With Pruning Purple: When To Prune, How Not To Kill Lavender

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Jan. 29, 2020



English Lavender (Photo: English Lavender)

**Q.** I have several lavender bushes that are looking woody and ragged. I have not pruned them before. What can you tell me about pruning lavender so my shrubs will bloom and look good this summer?

**A.** Pruning is essential to keeping lavender looking young, healthy, and vigorous, but now is not the best time to prune. You can remove any dead flower stalks and dead branches

during the winter but wait until summer to do any major pruning, after the shrubs bloom.

Unpruned lavenders become woody at the center and do not bloom nearly as much as ones that have been pruned properly so summer pruning every year is important. How to prune lavender depends on the type you are growing.

For pruning purposes, there are three basic types of lavender:

The first is English Lavender, *lavandula angustifolia*. It's quite hardy and can be cut back by two thirds of the shrubs size. Ideally right after first bloom in the summer so that it has time to regrow before frost. Often pruning at this time will stimulate the plants to bloom again in the fall. With English lavender you can even cut into the woody part of the plant and have it regrow. Remember this type of pruning should not be done at this time of the year. Wait to do any regenerative pruning in the summer.

The second is Spanish lavenders, *lavandula stoechas*. These are the lavenders that have flag like petals at the top of thicker pine cone shaped flowers spikes. This type doesn't do well with heavy pruning and responds best to a light pruning after bloom. These types of lavenders also tend to be less woody and more sprawling in shape, so they're often used as a ground cover. Spanish lavender has the shortest lifespan of the three types: About five years.

The third type include lavender crosses or lavedins, *lavandula X intermedia*. Popular varieties include Grosso and Provence. These shrubs bloom later than the English lavender, and shrubs have a longer flower spike than the English types, but they're not as hardy.

You can prune this type by a third — or at most a half — of the shrub size; but be sure to leave at least two sets of green leaves. Never prune this type back to the woody part of the shrub or you might kill the plant.

If your plant is this type of lavender, and it's three years old or older and has never been pruned, it may not survive heavy pruning. You may be better replacing the bush.

But if there's green growth just above the woody stems, start with light pruning to encourage lower growth, then prune a little heavier each year. This may work better with some varieties than others, so you'll just have to experiment.

Ideally, lavender should be cut back at least once a year, either after spring flowering or in the fall before frost danger is imminent.

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