

Lavender, A Drought-Tolerant Beauty

By Julie Silva

Four years of drought have left many yards barren and colorless. Some plants will not survive and evidence of their demise may be appearing now. What if we could add color with a tough plant that was fragrant and drought tolerant?

Lavenders are the work horse of tough plants for your yard. The variety of colors and sizes will fill any spot in your yard just as long as you follow a few simple rules. Lavenders love full sun. They do not like soggy feet so choose an area with companion plants that prefer to be drier. Lavenders do best in a soil with a pH somewhere between 6.5 and 7.5. Organic material helps balance the pH, adds air by loosening the soil and provides nutrients for the plants.



L. Stoechas, Otto Quast. Photograph by Gene Pearson.

Lavendula angustifolia, or English lavender, is probably the most well-known variety. It is native to the Mediterranean region. Its gray-green leaves are fragrant and bright against the standard green yard. Blossoms are blue, blue-violet, mauve, and deep violet shades. Varieties to look for are Munstead, Hidcote, and Jean Davis. These lavenders stay smaller but are fragrant. They are perfect for borders along walk ways.

Lavandula stoechas, or Spanish lavender, is a wild flower in the Mediterranean region. You can recognize Spanish lavender by the blooms - they look like pinecones with whirlybirds on the top. Count on them being big bloomers, usually from May to October. This type of lavender is a favorite of butterflies.

Other popular lavenders are hybrids, called *Lavandins*. These are usually crosses between English lavenders and broadleaf lavenders. These may be larger plants that will reach four feet if not pruned back. Varieties that are found easily are Provence, Grosso and Fred Boutin. *Lavandins* are grown commercially for essential oils, medicinal uses, flower arrangements, sachets, and massage oils for sore muscles. Since *Lavandins* have a strong fragrance, they are not good for cooking. These varieties are hardy, disease resistant, and pretty much year-round.

French Lavenders have a different texture, with gray foliage and serrated leaves. Quicker growing and larger, these plants need more room. Goodwin Creek Gray Lavender has a unique appearance and thrives on being ignored. Goodwin Creek grows lower and will spread to 3-4 feet without controls. The leaves added fragrance and texture to cut flower arrangements.

Spring is an excellent time for choosing your lavenders. Often times the growers force blooms prior to shipping to the retail stores. That gives you an opportunity to see the colors of the

blooms. Lavenders run from blue with white, pinks, yellow, green, white, and various shades of blues and purples, with many against gray foliage. Different plants bloom at different times for various durations. With some planning, your yard could have lavender blooming, the majority of the year.

There are so many varieties of lavenders; it may be hard to choose. The fragrances will be a beacon for butterflies and hummingbirds. The gray-green foliage will add texture and brightness to your yard. In keeping with our dry, hot climate, lavenders are not heavy water or fertilizer users.

As you visualize new plants in your yard for spring, take a look at the lavender family and their benefits. This is an easy-care plant and one that will surely add beauty to any garden.

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