Lavender Plant Care

Jackie Woods, UC Master Gardener

Planting areas: prefers mild winters, warm, sunny summers and well-drained soil

Size: 1' to 4' wide depending on variety

Bloom season: summer

Exposure: prefers full sun

Pruning needs: prune after flowers are spent or in early fall

Water needs: water until established, then drought tolerant. Does not like to be wet, but appreciates water during extreme hot weather.

Narrative: Lavender is a versatile garden herb with fragrant, colorful blooms. It is easy to grow, requires little care, is deer and snail resistant and butterflies and pollinators love it. The life span of most lavender plants is typically 7-10 years.

Common lavenders include English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* such as Hidcote, Royal Velvet and Purple Bouquet); *Lavandins* (Lavandula x intermedia) which are English lavender hybrids such as Grosso, Provence and Hidcote Giant); and Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas* such as Royal Splendour and Ballerina).

Lavender plants prefer neutral to slightly alkaline soil (pH 7-8) that is well drained. On the Central Coast, the best time to plant lavender is in spring after frost or in early fall. Plant along walkways for a stunning effect when in full bloom, as a border or interspersed throughout your landscape. When using drip irrigation, place the emitter to the side of the plant rather than at its base to lessen the chance of overwatering and potential for root rot.

Pruning helps maintain its round shape and also promotes new growth. Most varieties required pruning only once a year. The best time to prune is after the flowers are spent. Grab a handful of stems and, using a sickle knife or a sharp pair of shears, cut the stems a few inches above the woody part of the plant, leaving a couple of inches of green above the woody stems. If the goal is to dry the lavender for use in crafts, prune the stems when ³/₄ of the flowers are opened. This is when the buds are most fragrant.