

June 2021 Gardener's Corner

By Cate White, San Joaquin County UC Master Gardener

June is the month when Lavender plants are at the peak of their bloom. Lavender, a member of the mint family, is of Mediterranean origin and thrives in our warm climate and dry, alkaline soil. The entire plant, both flowers and leaves, is fragrant.

There are three primary types of lavender: English (*Lavandula angustifolia*), French (*Lavandula dentata*), and Spanish (*Lavandula stoechas*).

English lavender types have narrow smooth gray-green leaves and tall flower spikes. Most varieties are low growing and include "Hidecote" with deep violet flowers and "Munstead" with blue-lavender blooms. Each of these varieties grows up to a foot and a half tall and as wide. Other varieties can have white, pink, lavender, or deep blue flowers.



English Lavender
Open Stock

French lavenders have narrow tooth-edged leaves and flowers on short, rounded spikes topped with two flag-like petals. A commonly sold variety is "Goodwin Creek Grey", which has deep blue flowers and reaches two and half to three feet high and three to four feet wide. There are two widely available hybrids of the French and English types; "Provence" with light violet blooms and "Grosso" with dark violet blue flowers. To my mind, these have the most pleasing scents of all the lavenders. They are large plants growing to three or more feet tall and as wide.



French Lavender
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Spanish lavenders are compact plants at one to two feet high and up to three feet wide. They have unique dark purple button-like flowers on short spikes with two or more flag-like purple bracts on the top, and usually bloom earlier than other types. They are very drought resistant. They also reseed easily and can become invasive. Varieties include "Otto Quast" and "Wings of the Night".

All Lavenders need well-draining soil. Once established, they have low water requirements, and will actually suffer from over-watering. They grow well without fertilizer. While they are mostly pest free, they can be subject to root rot from overwatering and from lack of air circulation around their bases, so keep mulch away from their trunks. The best mulches for lavenders include pea gravel, decomposed granite, or sand, not organic matter such as bark. Their heaviest bloom is in late spring or early summer, although some plants may have repeat blooms. As herbs, they need regular shearing back by one-third or even up to one-half their size in order to stay neat

looking and to prevent them from becoming leggy or woody. This should be done right after the blooming period. Lavenders can be relatively short-lived, especially if they aren't pruned back regularly.

There are many uses for lavender, such as in sachets and potpourri. Fresh long stemmed blooms can be woven into wands or wreaths and then allowed to dry. Lavender can even be used in cooking and is a standard ingredient in the seasoning "Herbes du Provence". It is especially good with grilled meat, chicken or fish. It can also be used in sweets, such as ice cream or cookies. It can even be used to flavor tea. For culinary use, *Lavandula angustifolia*, or the hybrid types are best, as many of the others contain unpleasant strong-tasting chemicals.



Bundles of Lavender Drying
Sunset.com

June Garden Checklist

- Thin fruit on stone fruit trees. Be ruthless! Thinning avoids stressing your trees and results in larger, better fruit.
- Check irrigation to be sure all units are functioning correctly. Adjust days and timing according to city regulations and temperatures.
- Apply mulch to bare areas
- Fertilize and dead-head roses
- Early June is still time to plant seeds or seedlings of beans, corn, cucumbers, squashes and basil, and seedlings of eggplants, tomatoes and peppers. You can also plant dahlias and colorful annuals such as zinnias, vinca and calibrachoa.
- For color and water conservation, plant pots with succulents. There are hundreds of interesting varieties to choose from. Portulaca is a low-growing succulent annual with attractive showy flowers.
- Control aphids and white flies with Neem oil or insecticidal soaps. Keep in mind that these are short-acting pesticides that will harm bees only if they come into direct contact with them. Once they have dried on the plant, they are no longer a danger to bees. This is why they should be used later in the day, or even after the sun sets, when bees are no longer present. Spraying at this time of day will also prevent damage to your plants, which can occur if it is done in full sun.