

HISTORY

Lavenders (*Lavandula* spp) originated around the Mediterranean in poor, rocky soils and mild coastal climates. Lavenders are aromatic herbs with traditional medicinal and culinary uses. Today they are commonly grown as decorative, scented ornamental plants. There is a market for the production of lavender plants for ornamental use. There are also opportunities for value added production of specialist lavender products, and for lavender essential oil. However, these latter are specialist and demanding markets and require a much higher level of investment by the producer.

VARIETIES AND THEIR USES

The **Lavenders** are a genus of about 25-30 species of flowering plants. Table 1 provides a list of some of the most common lavender varieties. All lavenders are evergreen shrubs with a strong scent. Flowers range from rich deep purples through subtle blues to delicate pinks and whites.

Table 1: Lavender varieties

Variety	Common name(s)
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	English Lavender, True Lavender
<i>Lavandula bipinnata</i>	
<i>Lavandula canariensis</i>	
<i>Lavandula dentata</i>	French Lavender
<i>Lavandula heterophylla</i>	Sweet Lavender
<i>Lavandula intermedia</i>	Lavandin
<i>Lavandula lanata</i>	Woolly Lavender, Spanish Mountain Lavender
<i>Lavandula latifolia</i>	Spike Lavender
<i>Lavandula multifida</i>	French Lace Lavender
<i>Lavandula pinnata</i>	
<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	Spanish Lavender, Italian Lavender

NB this is only a summary table as there are over 28 different *angustifolia* lavenders alone.

As a general rule the hardiest varieties and hence those most suited to the Welsh climate are *Lavandula angustifolia* and *Lavandula x intermedia*.

***Lavandula x intermedia* - lavandins**

The *x intermedia* hybrids are a cross between *angustifolia* and *latifolia* lavender. The hybrid vigour of these plants makes them hardy, but they are sterile. Called lavandins, this group typically has larger leaves, longer stems and larger flower heads that are pointed at the top instead of barrel shaped. The oil yield of the lavandins is much greater than from the *angustifolias*, so they have become the “work horse” in the fields of France. Not only are these plants hardy and disease resistant, they have an attractive appearance during the winter months.

The lavandin cultivar “Grosso” is the most widely grown lavandin.

Oils from lavandin are commonly blended, either with *L. angustifolia* oil or with commercially available essential oils, to create a pleasing fragrance. Whole plants in flower can be used for essential oil production. Buds, flower spikes, and flowering tips – both fresh and dried – have a variety of culinary, fragrance, and decorative uses.



Fig 1 *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' and 'Munstead'

PROPAGATION

Lavender can be grown from seeds. However the best plants and most reliable varieties come from cuttings. Seed may not come true to type as cross pollination and incorrect labelling are common.

Soft wood cuttings can be taken in spring from non flowering stems. Take sections of stem 8-10 cm long, from strong, healthy sections rather than older woody sections of stem. Prepare the cuttings by trimming the stem to just below a set of leaves, and then remove all the leaves from this area. Four cuttings can be placed around the edge of a 9 cm pot filled with a loose structured potting compost mix (see figure 2). Alternatively, for large scale production, module trays are usually used – one cutting per cell.



Fig 2 Planting cuttings



Fig 3 Module tray with cuttings
(nb – cuttings are rosemary in this photo)

Rooting will take 2 - 3 weeks in optimum conditions, but rooting can take as long of 8 weeks. Bottom heat will help to promote root establishment. The quicker the cutting strikes, the less risk there is of it rotting and failing. Fungal infections are a risk so monitor your plants regularly and ensure there is a good flow of air around the plants.

Small scale growers usually grow the plants on for a further four or five months before transplanting to the field

The purchase of large numbers of plug lavender plants is also an easy option available to those looking to plant larger areas. Plugs are available from a number of wholesale outlets and prices at the time of publication range from 25p-44p per 4cm plug. Organic seeds can also be found but ensure they are from a reputable supplier.

PLANTING and ESTABLISHMENT

Lavender likes free draining soils preferably sandy and loamy soil. They also enjoy a lot of sunlight so south facing fields are recommended. Soil pH should range between pH 6.0 and 7.0.

Lavender plants / plugs are usually planted in early May – this reduces the chance of plants being affected by frost. Planting of plugs can be done with a machine or by hand.

After flowering, plants should be cut back to the first leaf level. Do not cut back into old wood, and do not cut back after September as the cut wound may not heal. This will ensure a dense bushy plant in the second year. Lavenders are a long-lived perennial, with a typical productive life of about 5 - 10 years, although plants have been known to live for 20 years.

PESTS and DISEASES

Like most herbs, lavender has few insect pests: the green capsid bug or cuckoo spit, can be an aesthetic problem, however this is unsightly but harmless. Few fungal diseases attack lavender, but since there are no known remedies for them, chemical applications are not an issue. Lavender shab is the only killer disease. Spores of *Phoma lavandula* appear on the stems as minute black spots and cause the flower stalks to corkscrew and turn brown. Then parts of the bush die. There is no cure for shab, so if it does appear it is best to get rid of the plant completely. Most modern hybrids are resistant to shab, but 'Munstead' and occasionally 'Loddon Pink' are susceptible.