



Photo courtesy of parisandbeyond-genie

Lavender is Like a Puppy
By Mary Tran
UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

We love them both. Puppies become our best friends. Lavender is treasured for its relaxing perfume, the beautiful flowers, and its echoes of traditional crafts and remedies.

Both need a good home. For lavender this means planting in a place with sunlight all or most of the day, in soil that drains well. It tolerates both summer heat and winter frost, but needs dry feet. Once established it should be watered only when dry.

Picking the right variety of puppy and lavender is important. Is the puppy to become a guard, a pal, or exercise motivator? Is the lavender for a bee garden or hedge, for crafts, cooking, or extracting essential oil?

Basic kinds of lavender are:

Lavanda stoechas (“French” or “Spanish” lavender)

A small bush with lacey leaves and one flower barrel per stem. It is the preferred culinary lavender, but the flowers don’t dry well and the oil’s high ketone content (camphor scent) makes the essential oil unpleasant. Spain and Australia consider it an invasive weed. However, it blooms early so is great for bee gardens when planted beside late bloomers.

Lavanda angustifolia (“English” or “Vera” lavender)

Leaves are straight and narrow with flower whorls on long wands. It yields the best essential oil because it is 30% linalyl acetate (fruity scent). It is the most drought and deer resistant lavender so is good for hedges and rock gardens. Popular varieties include Hidcote, Premier, and Abrialli.

Lavanda latifolia (“Spike” or “Portuguese” lavender)

Closely related to *L. angustifolia*, but with broader leaves and less cold tolerance. The oil is half linalool (scent like bay or coriander) and one fourth eucalyptol (scent like camphor and eucalyptus). It has no linalyl acetate (sweet scent). A good plant for bees and butterflies.

Lavandula x intermedia (“Lavandin”, hybrid of *L. angustifolia* and *L. latifolia*).

Compared to the parent plants, lavandins are larger with more flowers in more colors and they produce more oil. Since the oils have the higher linalool content of *L. latifolia*, commercial producers often blend them with linalyl acetate for a sweeter scent. Popular varieties include Grosso (for oil), Provence (culinary and crafts), Grappenhall (largest lavender), and Alba (white flowers).

Puppy training is endless. Lavender training consists of pruning in mid-autumn or whenever you harvest the wands, to limit the plant size and woodiness. Trim off the top third of each stem or cut to within two inches of bare wood. With timely harvesting you can get a second or even third bloom in the same season. (*L. latifolia* is trimmed only in spring to maintain flowering.)

Breeding is a big decision for the puppy, but for the lavender it is just a question of collecting seeds or cuttings. For hybrids, cuttings are the only option. It is easiest to do this by clipping and rooting soft growing tips in early spring.

Learn more about the various lavender varieties and how to care for them this Saturday, June 8th at the Master Gardener class: “In Love with Lavender.” This free class will be held from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr, Placerville, CA.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.