



Post-Planting Lavender Care



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Once established, lavender plants require relatively little care or maintenance. However, lavender can live 10-15 years or longer by providing timely post-planting care to maintain plant health and vigor. In particular, good lavender care should address watering, fertilizing, weeding, harvesting, and pruning throughout life.

Watering

During their first growing season young lavender plants should be well watered to encourage good root development prior to winter dormancy. In the hot summer months you should water several times per week based on plant and garden conditions. For example, in the Palouse region of southeastern Washington we water every 2nd or 3rd day during our long hot dry summers. You should always water from below. Our farm uses a drip tape irrigation system. Watering from above can lead to fungal disease, plants that splay open in the center, and greater weed growth. Once lavender is more established in the 2nd, 3rd year and beyond the plants are fairly drought tolerant and need less frequent watering. However, plants should be deeply watered once every week or two weeks depending on soil dryness, when flowering to increase quality and yield, and following harvest to increase shoot growth and stimulate more flowering stems for next season. Watering should be stopped in September to promote hardening prior to the onset of winter. Remember, lavender thrives in well-drained soil and does not like their roots in standing water which can lead to root rot.



Drip tape irrigation system.



Watering planted lavender.

Fertilizing

Lavender thrives on low to moderately fertile soils, and therefore, should require little or no fertilization. However, closely monitor your plant's health, and if needed, fertilize following directions on the product label. Over-fertilized lavender tends to have fewer flower blooms and greater vegetative growth. In addition, lavender that is over-fertilized and/or over-watered has less intense fragrance, reduced oil quality, and diminished plant health. All fertilizing and watering should be stopped in September to promote lavender hardening before the onset of winter to lessen the occurrence of winter damage and mortality.

Weeding

Weed management is a necessary evil for ensuring lavender's growth and survival. Therefore, weed competition must be diligently controlled repeatedly throughout the growing season. Weeds growing through holes in the weed fabric and near the planting hole should be removed by hand. Weeds growing alongside the edge of the weed fabric covering the raised beds can be either mechanically tilled or removed by hand.

Harvesting

Lavender should be harvested between mid-morning and early afternoon, and not when the plants are wet from morning dew, rain, or during the hottest part of the day. A harvest early in the growing season promotes air circulation, new branch growth and a second bloom later in the summer. Harvest timing depends on your management objective and lavender cultivar. We harvest at the first sign of flowering (10-20%) to maximize the quantity of essential oils in the culinary buds while enhancing bud retention in dried bundles. Other management objectives include harvest for craft buds (<50% flowering), and production of essential oils (50-100% flowering). When harvesting flower stems, you should cut them low enough to get long flower stems while leaving about 2-inches of green foliage above the woody stems. This first harvest, which produces long flower stems, also serves as a "heavy" pruning. Harvested/pruned lavender should be cut to maintain a mound shaped crown. If plants are harvested near or at full flowering this will lessen the opportunity for harvesting a second bloom later in the summer.



Hidcote before harvest/pruning.



Hidcote after harvest/pruning.

Pruning

Between late August and early September, lavender plants not previously harvested/pruned should receive a "heavy" pruning in preparation for winter. This pruning should occur at least 6 weeks prior to the first freezing temperatures. Stems should be cut leaving 2-inches of green foliage above the woody stems. In addition, dead and low hanging branches should be cut and removed to promote better air circulation and prevent disease. This pruning should result in a mound shaped crown which helps prevent winter damage. Those previously harvested/pruned lavender plants should receive a trimming to remove second blooms, dead and low hanging branches, and create a mound shaped crown.

Some lavender growers prefer pruning in the spring, while the plant is still in winter dormancy or once green growth is noticed, but prior to bud formation. Whether you prune in the spring, fall, or during harvest, annual pruning is essential for maintaining long-term lavender health and vigor. The annual pruning slows down woody stem growth (a leggy plant), promotes new stem growth next spring producing better foliage and flowering, and maintains a dense mounded form.

Even when everything is done correctly, the unexpected can happen. Lavender does well when the weather cooperates, but losing plants following harsh winters or delaying the onset of flowering during cold wet springs is not uncommon.