

Garden Column 08/17/2011

Time for Lavender

By Kathy Ryan

Lavender is a favorite plant, with wonderful scent and colors ranging from white to dark purple.

I grew my first row of lavender in Seattle and learned it needs good drainage. Moving to Port Townsend, next to the Lavender Capital of Sequim, I was confident that I could grow better lavender in this drier, sunny climate. Plant in the fall preferably in raised beds to assure good drainage, in alkaline unfertile soil. Some farmers put white reflective sand or oysters shells around the plants.

Lavender is drought tolerant after it is established. Needs some supplemental water the first year after planting, spaced 30 inches apart and kept weeded.

There are 30 species of *Lavandula* with cultivars in the hundreds. 'Grosso' is the most widely grown favorite because dark purple color, generating very long stems for bouquets and produces good lavender oil. English Lavender, *L. Augustifolia*, is the best for cooking.

The best time to harvest your lavender is early morning after the dew is dry, before noon. Pick when there are 1 or 2 open flowers on stem for bouquets and when ½ of stem flowers are open for buds. Generally, harvest is during the month of July. If you cut your flowers at this time, you can sometimes get another set of flowers, although not as vigorous, in September. If you don't want to cut stems now, cut in the late fall to tidy and prevent a leggy plant. Lavender has a life span of 7-12 years.

When harvesting, gather your stems into a bundle with a rubber band no more than 1 inch in diameter. Then hang the bundle upside down in a dark room with good air circulation. It will be dry within a couple of weeks. The easiest way to de-bud a flower stem is to place in pillowcase and roll with a rolling pin.

Sachets can be tucked into drawers. I like to mix the lavender buds 50% with buckwheat or flax seeds and sew into a fabric pillow for neck roll or larger pillow for warming in the microwave for warmth, relaxation and aromatherapy.