

Lavender in the kitchen - cooking with lavender

I've always felt a special affinity for lavender. It's heady sweet scent is my favorite floral perfume and I look forward to lavender's soft color and grey green foliage every season. As a gardener, I have totally indulged my lavender fantasy and planted a solid fifty foot long row of lavender plants to form a beautiful long lavender hedge down one side of my driveway. Throughout late June and July, my lavender hedge is glorious celebration of color and fragrance that gives the entire neighborhood pleasure. The plants produce a wonderful abundance of aromatic flowers that my friends and I enjoy cutting and air drying for sachets and bouquets to give as gifts year round.

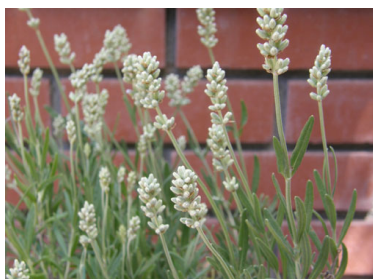


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With such generous amounts at hand, I've also discovered the joys of cooking with fresh or dried lavender. Like many edible flowers, using lavender in the kitchen is a time-honored practice dating back to the Middle Ages. It's a real satisfaction connecting with these centuries-old traditions of using the garden's bounty to grace the table, and fun creating new ways to enjoy the spicy blooms.

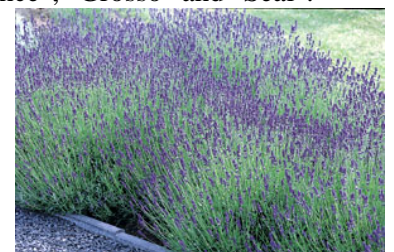
To cook with lavender, you must plant the sweetest scented varieties of these drought tolerant, deer resistant perennials. There are many to choose from in good nurseries and from mail order sources. Look for *Lavendula angustifolia*, which also may be sold as *Lavendula officianalis*, *Lavendula vera* or True English Lavender. Most *angustifolias*, which are actually sub-shrubs, reach 2 to 3 feet high and form rounded mounds 2 to 3 feet in diameter at maturity with grey green foliage and beautiful long spikes of richly colored florets.



spicy-sweet *angustifolias*.

More compact cultivars of *angustifolia* that have good culinary qualities include "[Munstead](#)", a low growing 1 1/2 foot tall, and petite "Lavender Lady", a recent fast-blooming introduction that grows just 1 foot tall. Both have fatter, more open blooms than the slim, narrow spikes of the taller *angustifolias*. Harder to find lavenders like white blooming "[White Ice](#)" and pastel pink "Rosea" have a mild and more candy-like scent. Another fine cooking lavender "[Hidcote](#)", is a semi-dwarf *angustifolia* which reaches 1 1/2 to 2 feet. Hidcote's flower spikes are an especially captivating deep violet blue, and its fragrance is more richly fruity than the other

Recently, several of the lavender intermediaries, or Lavandins, which are interspecific hybrids between *L. angustifolia* and *latifolia*, have become available in the U.S. These strong vigorous plants reach 3 feet tall with exceptional canopies of bloom. These lavenders are currently the plants of choice for French perfume makers and have very intense complex fragrance that is great in the kitchen. Look for the Lavandins "Provence", "Grosso" and "Seal".





Although French Dentata and Spanish Stoechas Lavenders are lovely garden plants, their flowers are too strong and bitter with camphor-pine overtones to be used in cooking.

All lavenders will thrive in very well drained soil in a location with full sun and good air circulation. They have few pest and disease problems if these basic requirements are fulfilled. This makes their flowers good kitchen candidates as it is critically important never to cook with flowers that have been treated with chemical pesticides of any kind.

Cooking with Lavender

Lavender flowers can be used either fresh or dried. They work to best advantage used to flavor the sugar or milk in baked goods.

Add a half dozen flower spikes to several cups of granulated sugar and seal for a week to make delicious lavender sugar to sweeten hot or iced green or black tea.

Add a subtle lavender essence to custard filled fresh fruit tart by infusing the warmed milk for the custard with 1/4 cup chopped lavender flowers to each 2 cups of liquid. Steep the mixture for an hour or two, than strain out the lavender and proceed with the custard filling recipe.

Make a delectable lavender syrup for fresh melon, berries or stone fruits by combining 1/2 cup sugar, 1/2 cup water, 1/4 cup sweet dessert wine and 2 tablespoons of orange juice. Heat the mixture to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Add 3 tablespoons of chopped lavender flowers and remove from the heat. Steep for 1 to 2 hours, than strain out the lavender. Pour this fragrant syrup over freshly cut up fruit and garnish with fresh mint leaves.

Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of finely chopped lavender flowers to your favorite sugar cookie recipe. Our [Lavender Shortbread](#) cookies are rich but not too sweet, and have just a hint of sweet lavender fragrance and flavor.



Steep 4 teaspoons of chopped lavender flowers in a cup of warmed honey with a tablespoon of lemon or lime juice for an hour. Reheat and strain out lavender. Drizzle this floral spread onto fresh toast with sweet butter or cream cheese.

Fresh lavender can be substituted in most savory recipes that call for rosemary - just use twice as much lavender as rosemary. For grilling, use fresh or dried lavender flowers, stems and leaves instead of fruit wood and add them to the white-ashed coals the last 15 minutes of grilling lamb, port or salmon steaks. The aromatic oils of the lavender add a wonderful herbal smoke flavor to the finished meat or fish.

Chop up fresh or dried lavender and combine with lemon juice and olive oil as a rub for pork or lamb. Marinate for several hours before grilling for a delicious rich flavor.

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