

# Lavender Production

## Introduction

Lavenders have everything for the modern garden as an amenity plant. They are evergreen, fast growing, compact and fragrant. The origins of its name are probably from the Latin word *Lavare* indicating the plant has another use as it means to be washed, and suggests it was regularly used to perfume bathing water.

There are numerous references to other qualities of lavender in Roman times – such as cure for mild epilepsy and as a laxative. The production of lavender for aromatherapy, perfumery and alternative medical purposes is now well developed in countries where various species of lavender are found naturally i.e. from the Mediterranean to the Middle East, India, North Africa and Asia.

In the U.K the crop is grown successfully in Norfolk, Suffolk and Kent for perfumery. There is a successful lavender farm that has been set-up in the UK on the Wirral - called 'phytobotanica' [www.phytobotanica.com](http://www.phytobotanica.com) . They started the enterprise as an alternative crop as farmers moved away from the potato production in this area. The success of this enterprise is interesting given that the soil is quite loamy.

There are no commercial Lavender production units in Ireland at present.

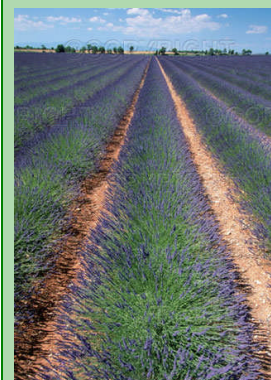
## Climatic Factors

Lavender production requires dry roots and shoots, free draining soils and reasonable light levels. Low fertility sandy soils are ideal with a Ph range of 6.0 to 7.0. Suitable growing areas in Ireland include the south east coast, south coast and areas on the east where rainfall levels are relatively low. When selecting suitable sites frost pockets should be avoided.

## The Market

The market for lavender in Ireland is unknown. There is no Irish market or market infrastructure requiring producers to develop their own products and outlets. It is possible to develop markets for specific products, which can only be carried out by small scale testing and market research.

There are two species of Lavender i.e. French *L. Dentata* and English *L. Angustifolia* grown by the nursery industry for the amenity market. Both are difficult to grow because of their dislike for overhead watering. Some good cultivators of both species are always in demand particularly for the garden centre market.



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This is one of a series of fact sheets on potential income generating activities.

*All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website*  
**[www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)**

**Edited by:**  
**John Whiriskey**  
**Paul McCarthy**  
Teagasc  
Mellows Development Centre  
Athenry, Co. Galway.  
**+ 353 (0) 91 845200**

Teagasc Fact Sheets present a brief overview of a topic. Further detailed advice should always be sought from relevant sources

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## Propagation and Production

Specialist propagators usually carry out propagation as it involves taking cuttings from growing stock under protection in February. Anti-condensation polythene is used during propagation. After the cuttings have rooted they are potted into 9cm pots and approximately 4 to 5 months later the plants are potted on into 2 litre pots. This is the size used for planting into the open ground. Ideally planting into open ground should take place in the spring with rows 1.2m apart and 0.4m between plants resulting in approximately 16,000 plants per hectare. As the plants have a low fertility requirement a light dressing of a compound fertiliser such as 10 – 10 – 20 should be cultivated into soil before planting to promote early growth. Weed control is extremely important. Ideally the plants should be planted through a fabric barrier such as a Mypex strip approximately 0.4 metres wide. Inter row cultivation can then be carried out mechanically.

Lavender plants that are harvested each year will keep going for longer than ten years.

A range on the lifetime of the crop is possibly 15 - 20 years. Under wetter conditions its lifespan may be reduced.

## Pest and Diseases

Few pests attack lavender with the exception of Aphids on the flowering stems. The main diseases are Phoma and Botrytis as well as bacterial softrot. These diseases are mainly associated with bad soils and humid damp climates.

## Suitable Cultivars

### 1. *Lavandula Angustifolia*

Traditionally known as English lavender and is the hardiest of all species flowering in June and July. The species produces the best quality oils but in lower yields than some of the hybrids. Munstead is one of the good cultivars used.

### 2. *Lavandula X Intermedia*

This hybrid (*Angustifolia* x *Latifolia*) is most widely grown for commercial oil production. Plants can grow up to 130 cm in height. The main cultivar used is 'Grosso'. The flower spikes are longer than *Angustifolia* with flowering taking place in July and August.

## Management

In the first 2 to 3 years plants require light trimming with a shears or hedge trimmer. Avoid trimming after September, as newly created wounds may not recover as growth ceases. Trimming and shaping plants in the early years is extremely important for the life of the plant.

## Establishment Costs and Profit Margins

The establishment costs are high but the crop requires limited amounts of artificial nutrients which is a plus. Different varieties of lavender are grown to provide both high quality lavender oil and essential oils can be extracted on site with distilling equipment. Lavender can be sold dried or as bunches. Once established, growing costs are not very high but harvesting could be, especially if done by hand. The other key is having the right steam distillation equipment on hand to extract the oil immediately after harvesting. Each potential producer should research and source a market before production.

Produced by: Patrick Gleeson, Teagasc, Friary Road, Naas, Co. Kildare

Email: [p.gleeson@kildare.teagasc.ie](mailto:p.gleeson@kildare.teagasc.ie) ☎ +353 (0)45 879203