

SACRED HERBS



Lavender - *Lavandula angustifolia*

It only takes a brief visit to my home to know that lavender is by far one of my favorite herbs. Not only is it beautiful and fragrant in the garden, it has hundreds of uses (literally). It's the constant staple in my essential oil stash and I use it just about daily in one way or another...

Lavender's claim to fame is its ability to enhance relaxation and promote restful sleep. Best of all, unlike some essential oils that require a lot of caution, lavender falls on the safer side of the spectrum, making it a great choice to use around babies and kids. A natural remedy that, for years, helped my kids stay calm and get to sleep.

Let's see what else it can do ...

Lavender: The Little Purple Flower With Power

Turns out there's good reason (many good reasons) why lavender is a crunchy mama's right hand helper in the home.

Originating from southern Europe and parts of Africa, Asia, and India, many ancient and medieval cultures relied on the herb not just for its signature scent but also its pain relieving and sedative properties.

Anti-Inflammatory

Painful inflammation can be treated with lavender oil. The oil's pain-relieving and numbing effects help soothe the inflammation, while the beta-caryophyllene in the oil also acts as a natural anti-inflammatory.

Thanks to its linalool and linalyl acetate components (which are present even when diffusing), lavender has protective effects shown to:

- Stabilize mood
- Improve sleep
- Soothe nerves
- Work as an expectorant
- Balance blood sugar
- Kill bacteria
- Relieve pain
- Speed wound healing.

Proven Benefits of Lavender

Here's why the little purple flower packs such a powerful punch:

Lavender for Better Sleep

There's a reason lavender is used in so many of my DIY creations. It is well known for its ability to relax the mind and improve quality of sleep. In one 2006 study, sleep-deprived college students inhaled either lavender or a placebo. Those who used lavender slept more soundly and felt more refreshed upon waking up. More study



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is needed to determine whether

it is safe to use

during breastfeeding (it's generally not recommended at this time), but it's exciting to see emerging research on how lavender might help women during the crucial postpartum time.

Improving postpartum sleep (or what little we mothers get anyway) sounds like a worthy cause to

me!

Lavender for Anxiety and Depression

On a similar note, many studies show interesting applications for lavender for memory, mood, and overall cognitive function. Just the odor of lavender seemed to help various test groups stay relaxed and focused when asked to do various stressful tasks, or improved their ability to recover feelings of wellbeing after exposure to stress.

Researchers continue to examine the possibilities for lavender in the treatment of dementia, anxiety, depression, and various neurological disorders.

(I don't know if those symptoms bring this to mind for anyone else... but lavender's soothing effects also make it great for managing PMS!)

Lavender for Skin Care

Due to its anti-inflammatory effects and ability to scavenge free radicals, lavender has a place in skin care. Lavender oil works to kill bacteria, and this can prevent and heal acne breakouts. It unclogs pores and reduces inflammation when you put it on your skin. To use lavender oil for acne, dilute it in coconut oil or another carrier oil and apply it to your skin after washing your face.

You can also use lavender oil as a facial toner by mixing two drops of lavender oil with one teaspoon of witch hazel. Soak a cotton ball in the blend and then gently rub it over your face. For a particularly stubborn pimple, argan oil can help reduce inflammation. Mix one drop of lavender oil with a drop of argan oil and put it directly onto a pimple twice a day. Give lavender a try in your DIY beauty routine. Use a quality oil (I like Plant Therapy) and the proper dilution for skin. If there's any concern about sensitive skin, try a test run on a small spot in the inner elbow.



Lavender for First Aid and Wound Healing

Studies (and much anecdotal experience) show that lavender reduces pain and itching from bug bites, bee stings, and even burns. In fact one 2011 study examined the benefits of lavender in healing episiotomies and another 2013 study showed lavender aromatherapy relieved pain after c-section. To use lavender oil on small wounds, mix three or four drops of lavender oil together with a few drops of coconut or tamanu oil. Apply the mixture on your wound with a cotton ball. If your wound has already healed, lavender oil can reduce remaining scars as well.

Lavender for Hair Growth

A 2016 study on mice showed lavender is an effective proponent of hair growth and significantly increased the number and health of hair follicles when applied in proper dilution daily for a period of 4 weeks. The properties make it great for healthy, shiny hair in general.



How to Use Lavender at Home

I use lavender in just about every area of my home. I keep both the dried herb and the essential oil around because they're needed for different preparations. While the options to use it are just about endless, here are a few of my favorite uses:

Dried Herb Uses:

- In a relaxing herbal tea – Lavender is too strong to be used by itself as a tea, but mixed with mint leaves it makes a soothing herbal tea. I often add chamomile too. Steep all in hot (not boiling water) for a few minutes and add honey if desired. Ahhh...
- As a dandruff remedy – Make an extra strong batch of tea, let it cool, and use as a scalp rinse to remedy dandruff. This cooled tea recipe also doubles as an after-sun spray.
- In a tincture – Used for medicinal purposes since ancient times, a lavender tincture can promote relaxation and sleep.
- Inside a pillow or mask – Add the dried flowers to homemade buckwheat pillows or sleep masks to help promote relaxing sleep.
- As a laundry or drawer freshener – I sew the dried flowers into small satchels and use them in place of dryer sheets in the dryer. (Great project for kids!)
- For infused vinegar – Infuse vinegar with the dried flowers for use in cooking or as a skin toner (diluted).
- As an air freshener – Simmer the dried herb in a pot of water with some citrus peels for a natural air freshener!
- As a face scrub – The dried flowers and oatmeal makes for a gentle, fragrant face scrub.

Essential Oil Uses:

- Diffusing before bed – Put a few drops in an essential oil diffuser before bed to help the house wind down and get ready to sleep
- To sooth sunburns or other burns – My absolute favorite burn remedy is this lavender honey burn salve. In a pinch, add a few drops of the essential oil to a bottle of cool water and spray on burns to offer relief.

- In the bath – DIY lavender-mint bath salts are divine after a long day and will help relax sore muscles.
- For headaches – Smelling lavender and peppermint oils helps headaches. Simply take a whiff of essential oil or keep this headache relief roll-on handy.
- In homemade bug spray – It is an essential ingredient in my DIY natural bug spray. (It works, I promise!)
- In beauty recipes – Add a few drops of the essential oil make a relaxing homemade lotion or lotion bar, or even a whipped body butter.
- For acne and skin irritations – I like to add a few drops of lavender and frankincense essential oils to my honey face mask and cleanser.



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