Lavender

Overview

Many people appreciate lavender (Lavandula angustifolia or Lavandula officinalis) for its fragrance. Lavendar is a common ingredient in soaps, shampoos, and sachets for scenting clothes. The name lavender comes from the Latin root *lavar*, which means "to wash." Lavender may have earned this name because it was frequently used in baths to help purify the body and spirit. However, this herb has also been used as a remedy for a range of ailments from insomnia and anxiety to depression and fatigue. Research has confirmed that lavender produces slight calming, soothing, and sedative effects when its scent is inhaled.

Plant Description

Lavender is native to the mountainous zones of the Mediterranean where it grows in sunny, stony habitats. Today, it flourishes throughout southern Europe, Australia, and the United States. Lavender is a heavily branched short shrub that grows to a height of roughly 60 centimeters (about 24 inches). Its broad rootstock bears woody branches with upright, rod like, leafy, green shoots. A silvery down covers the gray green narrow leaves, which are oblong and tapered, attached directly at the base, and curled spirally.

The oil in lavender's small, blue violet flowers gives the herb its fragrant scent. The flowers are arranged in spirals of 6 to 10 blossoms, forming interrupted spikes above the foliage.

Parts Used

Essential oil is extracted from the fresh flowers of the lavender plant and used for medicinal purposes.

Medicinal Uses and Indications

A number of studies have reported that lavender essential oil may be beneficial in a variety of conditions, including insomnia, alopecia (hair loss), anxiety, stress, and postoperative pain. However, most of these studies have been small. Lavender is also being studied for antibacterial and antiviral properties. Lavender oil is often used in other forms of integrative medicine, such as massage, acupuncture, and chiropractic manipulation.

Insomnia or Agitation

In folklore, pillows were filled with lavender flowers to help restless people fall sleep. Scientific evidence suggests that aromatherapy with lavender may slow the activity of the nervous system, improve sleep quality, promote relaxation, and lift mood in people suffering from sleep disorders. Studies also suggest that massage with essential oils, particularly lavender, may result in improved sleep quality, more stable mood, better concentration, and reduced anxiety. In one study, people who received massage with lavender felt less anxious and more positive than those who received massage alone. Several small studies suggest that lavender aromatherapy may help reduce agitation in people with dementia. Lavender flowers have also been approved in Germany as a tea for insomnia, restlessness, and nervous stomach irritations.

Alopecia areata

In one study of 86 people with alopecia areata (an autoimmune disease that causes hair to fall out, often in patches), those who massaged their scalps with lavender and other essential oils daily for 7 months experienced significant hair regrowth compared to those who massaged their scalps without the essential oils. However, there is no way to tell whether it was one or the combination of
oils that was effective. On the other hand, preliminary studies also show that lavender may be effective in treating women with hirsuitism (excessive hair growth).

Other uses

Aromatherapists use lavender in inhalation therapy to treat headaches, nervous disorders, and exhaustion. Herbalists treat skin ailments, such as fungal infections (like candidiasis), wounds, eczema, and acne, with lavender oil. It is also used in a healing bath for joint and muscle pain. One study evaluating treatments for children with eczema found that it was therapeutic touch from the mother that improved symptoms; in other words, massage with and without essential oils (including lavender) both reduced the dry, scaly skin lesions.

Another study found that lavender oil may improve pain control after surgery. Fifty people undergoing breast biopsy surgery received either oxygen supplemented with lavender oil or oxygen alone. People in the lavender group reported better pain control than people in the control group.

Available Forms

Commercial preparations are made from dried flowers and essential oils of the lavender plant. These preparations are available in the following forms:

- Aromatherapy oil
- Bath gels
- Extracts
- Infusions
- Lotions
- Soaps
- Teas
- Tinctures
- Whole, dried flowers

How to Take It

Pediatric

- Oral use in children is not recommended.
- May be used topically in diluted concentrations to treat skin infections and injuries, such as minor cuts and scrapes. For proper dilutions speak with a knowledgeable health care provider. There are some aromatherapy formulas for children as well. Speak with a knowledgeable provider for dosing. Never use lavender on an open wound. Seek immediate medical attention.
- A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* concluded that lavender and tea oils in some shampoos, soaps, and lotions may cause gynecomastia, breast development in boys. If you have any concerns, ask your doctor about using lavender for a child.

Adult

The following are recommended adult doses for lavender:

- **Internal use:** Speak with a knowledgeable provider to find the right dose for you.
- **Inhalation:** 2 to 4 drops in 2 to 3 cups of boiling water. Inhale vapors for headache, depression, or insomnia. If you have asthma, talk to your doctor before using essential oil inhalations to see if they are right for you. There are some people who find essential oil used in inhalation form irritating to lungs and/or eyes.
- **Topical external application:** For ease of application, add 1 to 2 drops per tbsp. of base oil (such as almond or olive oil). Lavender oil is toxic if taken orally. Only use the oil externally or by inhalation. Also, avoid contact with eyes or mucous membranes, such as the lips and nostril.

Precautions

The use of herbs is a time-honored approach to strengthening the body and treating disease. Herbs, however, contain active components that can trigger side effects and interact with other herbs, supplements, or medications. For these reasons, you should take herbs with care, under the supervision of a health care provider qualified in the field of botanical medicine.

Some people may develop an allergic reaction to lavender. Nausea, vomiting, headache, and chills have also been reported in some people after inhaling or absorbing lavender through the skin. Lavender applied to skin may cause irritation in some people. Oral use of Lavender may cause constipation,
headache, and increased appetite. Lavender oil is toxic if taken orally. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should avoid using lavender.

**Possible Interactions**

**CNS Depressants:** There are no known scientific reports of interactions between lavender and conventional medications. However, because lavender promotes relaxation, it may make the effects of central nervous (CNS) depressants stronger. These drugs include narcotics such as morphine or oxycodone (OxyContin) for pain, and sedative and anti-anxiety agents such as lorazepam (Ativan), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax). Ask your doctor before using lavender with these and other sedatives.

**Supporting Research**


### Alternative Names
Common lavender; English lavender; French lavender; Garden lavender; Lavandula angustifolia; Lavandula latifolia; Lavandula officinalis

### Version Info
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