

## **Our prayers are a sweet smell to God**

French Lavender (*Lavendula dentata*) is an evergreen shrub native to Spain. In colder climates it should be grown as a container plant so it can be sheltered in the winter. French Lavender can be distinguished from other species by its jagged or dented leaf edges. Foliage has a fuzzy appearance and is silvery-green in colour. French Lavender has a delicate fragrance - sometimes described as something between the typical lavender smell and rosemary. Plants will reach sizes 1-3 feet tall and up to 4 feet wide. Plants have a purple flower colour and bloom early Summer through to Autumn. When grown in a greenhouse or areas that get no frost French lavender will flower all year round. Generally this species is grown for its ornamental value rather than for its herbal qualities.

If the fragrance alone isn't enough to convince you to grow French lavender, consider that the plants are drought-tolerant, deer-resistant, and require little maintenance. More delicate in colour than English lavender, it is well-suited to drying for crafts and culinary use.

### **Requirements**

Lavender needs full sun and soil that is very well-draining. Once established, the plants tolerate dry conditions but they don't tolerate wet soil. Loose, sandy soil is best.

### **Planting**

French lavender is best planted on a mound where the excess water can run off. Set out plants after the last spring frost, spacing them 15 to 18 inches apart. Sow seeds in late winter or spring when a light frost is still possible. Keep the soil lightly moist and be patient. French lavender seeds can take two to three months to germinate. Wait until the seedlings are 5 to 6 inches tall before mulching with gravel.

### **Maintenance**

In the absence of rain, water the plants weekly during the first summer and once every three weeks in subsequent summers. The plants grow best and have the strongest fragrance when the soil is kept dry. Gravel mulch looks natural around lavender plants and helps prevent the soil from retaining too much moisture. French lavender doesn't need annual fertilization, but the plants benefit from a thin layer of compost every other year in late Autumn or Winter.

### **Pruning**

Cut mature French lavender plants back by one-third to one-half if they don't seem to be getting off to a good start. If they start growing in early spring just trim out winter damage and prune lightly to shape the plants. It's a good idea to cut the plants back by one-third every two or three years, whether they seem to need it or not. In summer, limit your pruning to removing spent flower stems. You can shear them off all at once after a big flush of blooms to encourage re-blooming. If you don't like the looks of the dried flower stems in Autumn, you can clip them off, but be careful not to cut into the leafy part of the stems. Cutting back too far encourages new growth at a time when the plant should be conserving its resources for winter.

Fragrant aromatic substances, including ointments, anointing oils, and incense are mentioned in quite a few places in the Bible. They were used for religious (rituals, etc.), health (medicinal), personal (pleasure, cosmetic), and funeral purposes. When a useful substance (like olive oil for anointing or to protect the skin in the hot, dry climate) didn't smell particularly good by itself, adding a fragrance added pleasure, a sense of significance, and a distinctive association.

Several fragrant spices and oils are mentioned in the Scriptures. A few of the fragrant substances were native to Palestine, and the others had to be imported, mostly from tropical countries. Most were relatively expensive, so their uses were reserved by most (the non-rich) for special occasions.

The “sweet incense” burned on the altar of incense in the tabernacle was fragrant incense made of equal parts of stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense (Exodus 30 v7, 34-35). This was for sacred use only; God did not permit any personal use. “Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people.” (Exodus 30 v37-38). The Scriptures clearly show that the burning of incense is a type of prayer going up to God (Revelation 5 v8; 8 v3-4). Our prayers are a sweet smell to God.

Consider these passages from the Bible:

2 Corinthians 2 v15

“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

Ephesians 5 v1-2

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Proverbs 27 v9

“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel.”

2 Corinthians 2 v14

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

Mark 14 v3-6

“While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly. ‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.’”

John 12 v1-

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus

was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected. 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.'"

Jesus recognised the "beautiful thing" of anointing him with this very precious offering. For one thing, it shows that the prayers of believers are not lost. They are sacredly treasured and are always before God, and in due time they will receive gracious and wise answer. The prayers of believers are very precious in God's sight. Burning incense made a most grateful and delicious perfume. Frequently in the Scriptures, acceptable prayer is described as producing before God a sweet fragrance. This is the Bible way of saying that God was pleased with the worship rendered to him.

There is an exquisite beauty in the thought that true prayer is fragrance to God as it rises from the golden altars of believing, loving hearts. The pleadings and supplications of his people on the earth are wafted up to him from lowly homes, from humble sanctuaries, from stately cathedrals, from sick-rooms and from the darkened chambers of sorrow - as the breath of flowers is wafted to us from rich gardens and fragrant fields.

This thought is very beautiful - that the fragrance which rises from garden, field and forest is earth's prayer to God. But still more beautiful is the thought that true prayer is itself fragrance to God - that he delights in it as we delight in the perfume of sweet flowers.

Enjoy the smells of your garden and try growing Lavendar!



Real aroma-therapy!