LAVENDER

*Lavandula spp.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Lavender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Lamiaceae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCM Name</td>
<td>Xun yi cao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayurvedic Name</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts Used</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native To</td>
<td>Mediterranean region, southern Europe, and parts of northern Africa, northeast India, and southeast Asia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Geographic Distribution**
Mediterranean, Europe, United States, Australia, and others

**Botanical Description**
Perennial shrub with up to 3 feet tall spikes holding whorls of blue to violet small flowers. Leaves are small and diverse, ranging from simple to pinnate to pinnate-toothed, to multiple pinnate, and dissected. Leaves are typically covered in fine hairs.

**Key Constituents**
Volatile oils (especially linalyl acetate, linalool, and cineole), flavonoids, tannins, coumarins, diterpenes, vitamin C, resin (Hoffmann, 2003).

**Sustainability Issues**
None known.

**Harvesting Guidelines**
Always harvest on a completely dry day and dry the plant as soon as possible after harvesting to decrease the likelihood of molding. When drying, do not expose to heat to help the plant retain its essential oils and lovely scent.
Uses

Lavender is a short perennial shrub in the mint family (Lamiaceae) which is native to the Mediterranean region, southern Europe, and parts of northern Africa, northeast India, and southeast Asia. There are four categories of lavenders: *Lavandula latifolia*, a Mediterranean lavender; *Lavandula angustifolia*, commonly known as English lavender; *Lavandula stoechas*, sometimes known as French lavender; and *Lavandula x intermedia*, which is a sterile cross between *L. latifolia* and *L. angustifolia*. All in all, there are over 30 species and many hybrids and cultivars (Koulivand et al., 2013). Lavender has narrow gray-green leaves and is well-known for its fragrant blue-violet flowers arranged on tall spikes. The flowers of other varieties and species range from dark purple, dark violet, white, and pink (Foster, 1993).

The fresh flowers are harvested and used to make lavender essential oil or dried for tea and other medicinal and culinary uses. Lavender’s medicinal action is attributed primarily to its volatile oils, which are also responsible for its strong aroma. The volatile oils in the flowers will impart a bitter taste to preparations, so it’s best to use lavender flowers sparingly or as part of a blend. Both lavender and its essential oil are considering “drying.”

The name lavender comes from the Latin word lavare, “to wash,” originating from the Romans who used lavender to scent their baths. Lavender has long been used for cleansing purposes, and was strewn about households to ward off plague and tucked into cupboards and drawers to repel insects. Lavender’s volatile oils are antibacterial and are effective against staph, enterococcus, streptococcus, and pneumonia (McIntyre, 1996; Cavanagh & Wilkinson, 2002).

Lavender’s strong scent is repellent to flies, mosquitos, and moths, and it effectively kills lice and parasites (Berger, 1998).

Due to its antibacterial and antiseptic properties, lavender is useful for disinfecting cuts, wounds, and sores while it soothes pain and aids healing (Foster, 1993; McIntyre, 1996). It also soothes the itch and pain of insect bites. As a burn treatment, lavender essential oil reduces the severity and scarring of the burn and speeds healing (7Song, 2013; Berger, 1998). After frequent application of lavender to an oven burn, my hand showed dramatic improvement within 24 hours. For this purpose, the essential oil can be mixed into a thick aloe vera gel and applied after the burn has cooled. This could also be applied to sunburned skin, since antioxidants in lavender oil also reduce skin damage from sunburn while it cools and soothes pain.
Lavender really shines as a nervine tonic for treatment of nervous system complaints such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and headache. In an anxious or stressful situation, inhaling the scent of lavender or drinking its tea can calm and relax the anxious mind, bringing perspective and enabling the clearer thinking necessary to ease the situation. Several scientific studies suggest lavender alleviates anxiety and depression (Koulivand et al., 2013; Cavanagh & Wilkinson, 2002).

By relaxing tension, lavender also may bring relief to headache sufferers. Rubbing lavender essential oil mixed with a carrier oil on the temples often brings quick relief. A clinical trial concluded that inhalation of lavender essential oil may be an effective and safe treatment for migraine headaches (Sasannejad et. al, 2012; Koulivand et al., 2013).

Lavender is a gentle tonic for strengthening the nervous system in the case of nervous debility or exhaustion (Hoffmann, 2003). The sweet spirit of lavender uplifts and balances emotions, eases mild depression and restores strength and vitality. It’s like a mother’s hand on your back, gentle and loving yet strong and supportive. As such, it can also be an ally during grieving.

Lavender acts as a mild sedative to resolve insomnia. Scientists hypothesize that chemical constituents in lavender interact with the part of the brain that controls the wake-sleep cycle (the reticular activating system) to induce sleep (Edwards, 2000; Bennett, 2014). Several scientific studies suggest lavender treats insomnia and improves sleep quality (Koulivand et al., 2013). A cup of lavender tea, a few drops of lavender oil on a pillow, or a sleep pillow full of lavender flowers are all lovely ways to ease into sleep.

As a carminative and antispasmodic (Hoffmann, 2003), lavender relaxes spasms in the digestive tract associated with tension and anxiety and relieves gas (McIntyre, 1996; Berger, 1998). Both 14th-century abbess Hildegard of Bingen (Berger, 1998) and modern-day herbalist Kiva Rose (n.d.) suggest lavender as a tonic for the liver, particularly for conditions involving tension and heat due to its relaxing and cooling nature.

Finally, lavender contains a class of compounds called monoterpenes, one of which is perillyl alcohol, which has been shown to stop cancer cells from dividing rapidly through a number of mechanisms, causing them to lose their tumor-like characteristics (Edwards, 2000; Bennett, 2014). “Perillyl alcohol has produced complete regression of breast tumors in laboratory animals and shows encouraging results against leukemia and other cancers, including those of the liver and pancreas” (Edwards, 2000).

References


Adult Dose
Tea: 1 teaspoon of dried lavender buds in 8 ounces of water steeped for 20-30 minutes. Drink 4 ounces 3x/day.

Tincture: 1.5-2 mL 3x/day of a 1:5 tincture.

Dosage information from Herbal Therapy and Supplements by Winston and Kuhn

Safety
Some sensitivity reactions and have occurred with the essential oil. A very small study in 2007 (Henley et al.) claimed to link tea tree oil and lavender in body care products to breast development in three prepubertal boys.

Ways to Use
- Glycerite (fresh)
- Infused oil
- Tea
- Poultice
- Salve
- Soak
- Steam

Tincture

Actions
- Nervine
- Anxiolytic
- Carminative
- Antispasmodic
- Circulatory
- Stimulant
- Antibacterial
- Antidepressant

Taste
Bitter (mild)

Energy
Drying
Cooling

Scientific Research (active links and the full list of research available in The Herbarium)

Ambient odors of orange and lavender reduce anxiety and improve mood in a dental office.

The analgesic effect of odour and music upon dressing change.

Aroma-therapeutic effects of massage blended essential oils on humans.

Aromas of rosemary and lavender essential oils differentially affect cognition and mood in healthy adults.

Aromatherapy alleviates endothelial dysfunction of medical staff after night-shift work: preliminary observations.

Aromatherapy and reducing preprocedural anxiety: A controlled prospective study.

Aromatherapy positively affects mood, EEG patterns of alertness and math computations.

Autonomic nervous function and localization of cerebral activity during lavender aromatic immersion.

... active links and the full list of research available in The Herbarium.
Articles on the HANE Blog

How To Make A Healing Salve
Essential Oils for Anxiety and Stress Relief
Blackberry Winter – Tips for Helping Bees
Homemade All-Purpose Cleaner (9 DIY Natural Cleaners)
How To Make Herbal Glycerites: Tinctures Without Alcohol
Don’t Itch About It: Quick and Easy Itch Relief Recipe
Crafting a Natural Bug Repellent with Essential Oils
How To Make And Use A Simple Herbal Burn Salve

Where to Buy

Dried flowers from Mountain Rose Herbs
Dried flowers from Amazon

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