

The Healing Power of Lavender

This Amazing Botanical should be your first pick for your herbal medicine chest, home cleaning cabinet and healing garden.

By D.J. Fletcher



Lavender is everywhere we look these days--from myriad shops selling soap and bath salts to upscale restaurants. Yet while many folks can now relate their fondness for lavender with lobster, duck or crème brûlée, most everyone has overlooked its serious medicinal properties. Even herbalists, aromatherapists and producers of essential oils often understate the medicinal importance of lavender.

As is true of most medicinal plants, the power of lavender to stimulate and supplement the body's healing forces is unmatched by modern pharmaceuticals. And amidst the aromatic plants (see Quick Definition), there seems to be no other plant essence equaling its broad properties. It can help heal a cut, a cold sore or shingles (herpes zoster). It can kill pathogens in the air and in nasal sinuses and respiratory airways. It stimulates the immune system, yet it's also analgesic--soothing muscle aches, taking the pain out of an insect sting and much more--and it does this all non-toxically. Lavender is also a nerve tonic and an antidepressant, boosting one's spirits as well as helping to beat "the blues" that accompany immune stress and illness.

The natural antimicrobial

Historical anecdotes tell us that the lavender fieldworkers and perfumers of the Middle Ages survived the Black Death and other plagues because lavender protected them from the lethal bacteria. Many modern studies

have proven that the oils of many lavender species exhibit antimicrobial action. For example, laboratory studies have shown that lavender oil can eradicate certain antibiotic-resistant bacteria. More than one strain of pathogenic *Staphylococcus*, including the common pathogen *Staphylococcus aureus*, are readily destroyed by lavender, say researchers at Cornell University. And according to the French researcher Dr. P. Belaiche, lavender is effective against a type of pathogenic *Streptococcus* often involved in coughs and colds.

In a 1973 study by the German researchers Wagner and Sprinkmeier, a blend of the essential oils of lavender, clove, cinnamon and melissa (commonly known as lemon balm) was found to be as effective in treating bacterial bronchial conditions as were commercial antibiotics. Bronchial conditions can also be viral, and studies have determined that lavender oil can effectively disintegrate certain viruses, including flu viruses. In addition, this natural antimicrobial has been shown to be an effective fungicide, helpful in eliminating thrush, an overgrowth of yeast (*Candida albicans*).

Lavender can be especially helpful in the medicine chest during the cold and flu season. According to James Duke, Ph.D., the retired U.S.D.A. botanist who studied herbs for many years, medicinal plants "offer our best hope for confronting drug-resistant bacteria."

QUICK DEFINITION

Aromatic plants such as lavender, mint and thyme have glands that exude volatile oils, or essential oils, which have medicinal properties. Both the plants and their oils can be described as aromatic, the expression referring not to their fragrance but to an old term for the chemical structure upon which many of the constituents in the oils are based.

Visitors attending the first annual lavender festival and conference last July in Sequim, Washington, were delighted to descend upon local fields such as this one at Purple Haze



farm.



This is a message worth heeding, especially if you need to put an end to a chronic cycle of illness and antibiotic drugs. Many individuals and families are stuck in this cycle, struggling through recurring bouts with ear, throat, sinus and upper respiratory infections. They make one trip after another to their doctor for antibiotics, but never really seem to get well. Unfortunately, in spite of all the known problems with antibiotics, these drugs are still being used indiscriminately and prematurely in U.S. children. Children are then prone to recurring relapses with the same illness because their immune systems haven't gotten a chance to recognize invading microorganisms and to learn to make protective antibodies. The current corporate germ-scare campaign is contributing to this debilitating cycle by overly promoting the use of antibacterial cleaners, wipes and soaps. These commercial products contain harsh substances that

chemically strip tissues of normal flora--the "good bugs" that don't cause disease.

Escape all these problems by making lavender your first pick for herbal home healthcare. Though lavender isn't the strongest antibacterial agent of all the aromatics, it is the safest to use with children. Experts say pure, unadulterated lavender rarely causes an allergic reaction and has very low oral toxicity. It is also one of few essential oils (see Quick Definition) that can be applied undiluted (neat) to the skin. And with its wonderful fragrance, it's the ideal choice for introducing children to herbal gardening and the therapeutic use of herbal infusions and essential oils.

Lavender fieldworkers and perfumers of the middle ages are said to have survived the Black Death because lavender protected them from the lethal bacteria.

How-to-Use Guide

Treatments can generally be repeated as often as needed according to symptoms (and common sense). Adults can safely enjoy many benefits by simply applying a couple drops of lavender oil to wrist, temple or behind the ear. For children under 12, dilute dosages by one half or more. For children under 2, limit use to lavender baths with one or two drops of oil.

Massage therapy using essential oils, diluted to 1.5% to 3% concentration (about 5 to 18 drops) per ounce of carrier oil, is an effective therapy for muscle pain and tension, headache, anxiety, many kinds of imbalance and inflammation, cough, sore throat and more. The many massage techniques and benefits are a study in themselves.

Use properly stored, therapeutic-grade essential oils only. Before using, do a patch test, placing a drop on skin of inner arm and observing response. Take care to avoid oil contact with eyes, and store oils safely away from children and pets. For safe and appropriate use during pregnancy, consult professional advice. Also consult professional aromatherapists for advanced information about applications and essential oil blending.

Aromatic Skin-Brushing

Benefits: Stimulates immune system, blood circulation and lymphatic drainage.

Procedure: Before showering, place 7 drops lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* variety), 3 drops *Eucalyptus radiata* and 2 drops tea tree in palm of hand. Rub vigorously over body (not your face) using a circular motion moving toward your heart. Do daily during cold and flu season.

Therapeutic Hot Bath

Benefits: Effective oil delivery via skin absorption, inhalation and smell. Useful at first sign of illness and during colds, flus, congestion, insomnia, anxiety, restlessness, muscle aches, etc. Also induces stress reduction and deep relaxation.

Procedure: Add about 8 drops lavender to a full tub, agitating water to disperse droplets of oil. Soak for at least 15 minutes. May substitute 7 drops lavender, 3 drops *Eucalyptus radiata* and 2 drops tea tree.

Therapeutic Foot Bath

Benefits: Alternative to full bath; more concentrated delivery through skin. Useful for systemic imbalances and infections such as colds and flues; local infections such as athlete's foot, etc. Also induces stress reduction and deep relaxation.

Procedure: Fill small tub (or bucket) with warm to hot water and add about 6 drops lavender. (Try different species and varieties to find your favorite.) Soak feet at least 10 minutes twice a day. May substitute 5 drops lavender, 2 drops *Eucalyptus radiata* and 1 drop tea tree.

"Waiting to Inhale"

Benefits: Delivery through inhalation (into lungs and sinuses) and also to brain via olfactory-to-limbic pathway. Useful for chest and sinus congestion, cough, hay fever, nervousness, mild depression, insomnia and much more.

Procedure: Bring 2 or 3 cups water to near boiling and pour into a bowl. Add 3 to 8 drops lavender oil or a handful of flowers. Cover head and bowl with towel and breathe in vapor for 3- to 5- minute intervals. A portable alternative: Wet a washcloth with very hot tap water, then wring out. Place on cloth 3 drops lavender and inhale.

Soleful Aroma-Reflexology

Benefits: Absorption through feet during pressure-point foot massage. Useful for imbalances and infections such as colds, flues, childhood diseases. Amazingly effective technique to soothe and deeply relax children or adults who are sick, in pain or anxious.

Procedure: Dilute 10 to 20 drops lavender in an ounce of carrier oil. (Otherwise, use a few drops neat.)

Rub into sole of one foot at a time. Gently begin focusing on pressure points, including at least the inside

of the arch and the toes. It is not necessary that the person giving the massage know reflexology, but it's worthwhile learning the major pressure points.

Hot to Cold Compresses

Benefits: Hot: variety of placements for sinusitis, anxiety, muscle aches, pains, insomnia and more. Warm: neck area good for mumps. Cold: back of head and neck good for headache, asthma (if not an acute attack) and more.

Procedure: Add 5 to 8 drops favorite lavender oil to 2 cups water (hot or cold) in a bowl. Agitate to disperse oil droplets. Briefly soak cotton cloth. Wring out cloth and place at once on skin for 10 to 15 minutes, longer if desired. Can repeat several times.

Itchy Ouchy Relief

Benefits: Topical antiseptic and antimicrobial. Effective treatment of burns, insect bites, minor cuts, rashes, abrasions and

symptoms of shingles. To treat a rash, first diagnose its cause and do a skin sensitivity patch test.

Procedure: Apply a few drops of neat lavender oil directly to skin. Repeat as often as needed--within reason. Can use a very soft artists brush to apply to painful area. For burns and serious skin conditions, use only *L. angustifolia* varieties. For other conditions, also try some different lavandins (the hybrid lavenders).

Lavandula Tisane

Benefits: Rejuvenating and rebalancing tonic tea: calming, antidepressant, anti-anxiety, soothing to throat and sinuses.

Procedure: Place 1/2 to 1 tsp. lavender flowers in teapot or mug (with saucer to cover). Pour in about 8 ounces hot water, just below boiling point. Cover and let steep for 3 to 5 minutes. Strain. Add a splash of orange juice and drink. (Can sweeten further, if desired.)

Air Diffusion

Benefits: Inhalation therapy and antimicrobial air-cleansing technique; also stimulates olfactory-to-limbic pathway via smell.

Procedure: Oils can be diffused for 5- to 10-minute intervals several times per day and night. Electric

diffusers and nebulizers allow broad diffusion without heat, which would fracture the bioactive molecules.

Vaporizers can be useful (especially for laryngitis) if you place an oil-saturated cotton ball near the steam opening. Candle-powered oil "burners" can be used in spaces with ample fresh air, provided they don't overheat oils. Other devices include light-bulb rings and blank "plug-ins" to electric outlets. All of these products are available from health-food stores and essential oil producers.

Aromatic Spray Cleaner

Usage: Disinfectant surface cleaner (not for glass).

Formula: Put about 1 tsp. borax into a spray bottle. Add 2 tblsp. white vinegar and 2 cups warm water. Then add about 1/2 tblsp. lavender oil--a lavandin is a good choice. Can substitute 1/4 tblsp. lavender, 1/4 tblsp. eucalyptus and several drops tea tree oil. To use, shake bottle well. Spray and scrub, then rinse with a clean, damp cloth.

A Powerful "Modifier"

Lavender shouldn't be thought of as simply a one-dimensional remedy, however, the way antibiotics and other allopathic drugs are regarded. This aromatic herb, like other botanicals, is by nature a holistic remedy. Taking our cue from botanical studies, we find that the aromatic oils perform an array of healing and protective functions in the plants themselves. Our use of them benefits by recognizing this fact.

Whether we extract the oil constituents by crushing and steeping the flowers in hot teas or infusions, or we obtain all the oil constituents by a distillation process, we need the sum total of all the constituents--not just one or more active ingredients. It is a common reductionist misconception (coming from allopathic thinking) that the therapeutic benefits of a botanical are due just to one or two predominant constituents. Though an essential oil can be chemically analyzed and its constituents identified separately, its therapeutic power is synergistic--that is, it is due to the complete, natural mix of bioactive constituents. Just as the functioning of our immune, endocrine and nervous systems--the three systems that benefit most from lavender treatments--are linked, so are the healing mechanisms of the natural botanical constituents.

French practitioners of aromatherapy (see Quick Definition) are known for their expertise in using essential oils holistically--as what they call "modifiers of the terrain." They talk in terms of altering the "biological terrain," the internal factors affecting a person's health that must be strengthened and balanced. For example, we need a healthy response to stress; otherwise, over time, our immunological response to pathogens would be compromised or altogether undermined. This is why it's said that "it is much more important to know what sort of patient has a disease than what sort of disease the patient has." Terrain assessment stands in contrast to the conventional model of symptom management, which focuses on identifying and killing pathogens instead of looking at the state of the whole person and her or his interconnected body systems.

Lavender has been found to be an ideal "modifier" for many situations. Because it and other aromatics work to strengthen the body, they make us less hospitable hosts to pathogens and thereby help us overcome the need for antibiotic drugs. At the same time, lavender and other aromatic herbs such as thyme and oregano are powerful antimicrobial agents. And due to their broad, complex biochemical properties, they don't cause adverse side effects or bacterial resistance. "Infectious microbes do not appear to become accustomed to the essential oils as they do to the many forms of treatment using antibiotics," said French physician Dr. Jean Valnet, a pioneer in clinical aromatherapy.

Medical Lavenders -- Which to Use?

All lavenders are members of the genus *Lavandula*, in the family Lamiaceae (also known as Labiatae), as are the mints, thyme and oregano. Varieties of species in the sections *Lavandula* and *Stoechas* are used medicinally.

Lavandula angustifolia is commonly referred to as English lavender, true lavender, *L. officinalis* and *L. vera*. It's called the "universal oil" because it has so many applications. Oil of *L. angustifolia* is known for healing burns and all types of skin wounds; producing mild sedative effects; having strong antimicrobial action and other properties.

Lavandula latifolia (formerly *L. spica*) is commonly called spike lavender. It has excellent therapeutic properties used externally, but they are limited due to relatively high camphor content. (In sufficient quantities camphor can be neurotoxic.) Spike lavender is strongly antiviral; works well for treating upper respiratory conditions through inhalation; is used for muscle aches, as an antiseptic and to relieve the sting of insect bites.

Alavandin, or hybrid lavender, is a cross between spike lavender and *L. angustifolia*. The name consists of two parts: *Lavandula x intermedia*, plus the name of the particular cultivar (a plant that's grown from cuttings, not from seeds). The lavandins are true lavenders, with a somewhat different mix of constituents and a higher percentage of camphor than *L. angustifolia*. Lavandins may be more antimicrobial and antiseptic, and equally therapeutic for some applications, except serious burns. They work well for easing upper respiratory, muscle and many other systemic conditions, and for quelling insect stings, minor skin rashes and itches.

Lavandula stoechasis commonly known as Spanish lavender and has some valid external applications, such as inhalations for chest and sinus congestion. But it also has high camphor content. The uses of certain varieties should be further explored by researchers.

Caveat emptor (let the buyer beware). Therapeutic essential oils should meet the highest standards of distillation and purity. The medicinal properties of different lavender plants vary significantly according to soils, climate, harvesting and distillation techniques, etc. While someone with an "educated" nose can discern many differences, no one can make a 100% accurate olfactory analysis of oils. Accurate profiles require analysis using laboratory tests (chromatography and mass spectroscopy).

Ideally, consumers should know whether an oil has passed analytical tests for purity and potency. Many essential oils on the market are adulterated or of inferior quality. Adding to the problem is that "there's a terrific amount

of confusion in horticultural materials," says oil expert Dr. Arthur Tucker of the University of Delaware.

Unfortunately, product accountability is still rare, and it is difficult to tell whether you're getting a therapeutic-grade oil. But as chemist Don Roberts, Ph.D., of Premier Botanicals in Albany, Oregon, says, "The more producers disclose their varieties, processes and analyses, the more all producers will be forced to be accountable. This will give people a much-needed choice based on honest information."

Meanwhile, try one type of essential oil or batch of flowers at a time; give each a chance to prove itself; and record your impressions. Assign each oil an expiration date (about two years after purchase, depending on heat and exposure), and store it in a dark colored-glass bottle in a cool, dark place to prevent degradation and accelerated oxidation and to ensure bioactive potency.



Lavandula angustifolia



Lavandula x intermedia "Grosso"

QUICK DEFINITION

Essential oil is the term given to the oil, or volatile herb, that occurs naturally in aromatic plants and is extracted by distillation. The oil is a mixture of aromatic compounds forming an oily liquid (unlike the viscous, petroleum-based liquid we normally think of as an oil). Essential oils have been called the healing life force of plants; they contain many of the plants' healing nutrients, oxygenating molecules, amino acid precursors, trace minerals, enzymes, vitamins, hormones and more.

Strengthening our defenses and vitality

The ancient Egyptians and Greek physicians documented the fact that aromatic plant oils ward off illness and bring about better health. Still, today, much has yet to be learned about exactly how lavender and other plants exert their amazing powers. No one fully understands the complex, synergistic healing mechanisms of medicinal plants. It is known, though, that inhaling aromatic oil vapor molecules transmits impulses from olfactory nerves to the limbic system, a part of the brain that is involved with our emotions and stress response. The molecules signal the brain to modulate the stress response, and they also stimulate the release of certain neurotransmitters. Continuing research may someday further explain how this works.

Researchers do know that, absorbed through the skin, the essential oil molecules reach blood capillaries and lymph channels. The effects are many, including positive immunological, hormonal and neurological effects.

Researchers have only partially explored how extensive these particular effects are, but they know, for example, that compounds called terpenes--major chemical building blocks of both the aromatic plant oils and of human steroidal hormones--modulate and help rebalance hormones.

We seem to be entering an era in which scientists will unlock many of the molecular mysteries of the energetic and chemical pathways through which plant oils communicate and interact. But we don't need to unravel these mysteries as much as we need to respect them and the practical wisdom about healing plants and aromatic medicine that has been passed down to us. Many experts, including Kurt Schnaubelt, Ph.D., and Robert Tisserand, have found that essential oils stimulate the immune system rather than depressing it, which is what allopathic drugs do. Aromatherapist and herbalist Melissa Farris of Forestville, California, says that one of many especially effective immune-stimulating treatments combines the use of lavender and two other essential oils with a skin-brushing technique. (Farris notes that, in a Bastyr University study, skin-brushing was shown to boost the immune-defensive T cells.)

To use lavender and other aromatic herbs or oils to their full potential, however, we need an overall strategy for prevention and self-care. For some, this means a shift in health habits that requires thinking carefully about the internal and external factors that are affecting our health. It also involves thinking about how to strengthen our immune defenses and vitality while decreasing endocrine and immune stresses. This is important, especially for an individual or family trying to break a cycle of illness and antibiotics.

In addition to incorporating aromatic oils into self-care, it pays to look at restructuring diet and exercise, and taking nutritional supplements and probiotics (the "good bugs" such as acidophilus and bifidus, which repopulate beneficial intestinal bacteria destroyed by antibiotics).

We also need to assess stresses on the mind and spirit--those less tangible yet very potent causes of ill health. And we should look at our "external terrain"--any toxins, allergens or irritants in our houses, schools and workplaces that are pathogenic or stressful to the immune system.

Clearing the air

Good indoor air quality is so important to health--especially during cold weather when we're heating our homes. "Each day we breathe about 23,040 times and move around 438 cubic feet of air," pointed out Diane Ackerman in *A Natural History of the Senses*. It therefore makes sense to let in fresh air and also to cleanse the room air with lavender and other appropriate aromatics. At the same time, take care to avoid fumes from commercial cleaners, sealants, burning candles and so on, which can rise to toxic levels in closed-up spaces. And avoid the irritation to mucous membranes, sinuses and lung tissues caused by harsh household chemicals. Replace cleaning solutions with lavender vinegar and other natural botanical cleaners.

Persons who are "run down" (in a state of immune weakness or overload) tend to be more susceptible to pathogenic viruses and bacteria. Many airborne pathogens can be eliminated from the air with diffused lavender oil and certain oils blends. Also, if children in a household are too young to understand good hygiene, the "bad bugs" borne on surfaces such as doorknobs, faucets, tables and toys can become a concern. It's a good idea to clean often with natural botanical disinfectants that include lavender. These aromatic blends will help eliminate pathogenic bacteria, viruses and fungi.

Different species, many uses

Lavender is sometimes used as a primary treatment--as in the relief of insomnia--but more often as an adjunct along with other modalities.

Frequently it is used in combination with other aromatics, such as the antimicrobials tea tree and thyme. It is very important to learn about different properties and applications, and then compare the uses of different medicinal lavender species and varieties. (See Medicinal Lavenders sidebar.) Test different ones, and make note of the most efficacious. For many applications, you can use either the essential oil or the fresh or dried flowers, but you'll find the essential oils much more potent.

Both the oils and flowers are used to make inhalation steams, compresses, infusions, liniments, fomentations and other traditional treatments. If you look in an old nursing or home healthcare book, you'll find how best to make these. Therapeutic massages with lavender oil generally require that you dilute the oil in a quality carrier oil such as almond, apricot or sesame. (See the How to Use Guide.)

Lavender is also employed in steams and teas: it is diffused into the air for air cleansing; it is used for treating sinus and upper respiratory conditions; and it is used as an antitussive (to relieve coughing).

Diffusion methods include nebulizers and other diffusion devices available from essential oil producers. Do not overheat the oils or substitute "aromatherapy" candles for pure essential oil: Inhalation of candle smoke and burned oil fumes is not good for your health!

So many healing properties

As a topical wound healer (cicatrisant) and stimulator of cell regeneration (cytophylactic), the oil of lavender -- especially *Lavandula angustifolia*--helps heal skin wounds and burns, including the skin burning that follows radiation treatment. It also helps relieve the pain and irritation of sunburn, insect bites and other skin conditions. Lavender is an antimicrobial, sympatholytic (it reduces the stress response) and a hypotensive (it reduces blood pressure). It is useful for relieving insomnia, anxiety, neuralgia and tension. Used regularly, lavender has been said to help relieve mild asthmatic wheezing and the inflammation and pain of arthritis. And it's used as an analgesic and antispasmodic for other chronic pain, including rheumatism and muscle aches. As a vasodilator, lavender vapor has been shown to relieve some types of headaches and migraines.

Lavender has been proven to be quite effective in the clearing of depression, especially if used in conjunction with other natural remedies. As a gentle

rebalancing tonic for the nervous system, it is always helpful in states of nervous debility or exhaustion. The British medical journal *The Lancet* has reported that vapors of lavender oil induce sleep equally as well as sleeping medications, with mild broad-spectrum sedative actions.

Mixed with thyme, another antimicrobial, lavender can be applied to the soles of the feet, and from there it will reach the lower bronchial capillaries without being broken down. It is also employed as an expectorant, emmenagogue (menstrual stimulant), astringent (a substance that causes tissues to contract), carminative (an agent that relieves bloating due to gas and spasms) and more. The English herbalist Penelope Ody has recommended that a weak infusion (25% normal strength) be given to babies for colic, irritability and excitement. And lavender is used in eliminating lice, dandruff, halitosis, water retention, endometriosis, vaginitis, cystitis, sluggish circulation and other conditions. The list goes on.

QUICK DEFINITION

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils for healing, rejuvenation or relaxation. The term was coined by Dr. R.M. Gattefosse in his 1928 book. While the prevailing notion is that aromatherapy is a treatment given only through the olfactory nerves to the limbic system, it is also given therapeutically via other delivery routes: internally; through the skin for direct absorption into the bloodstream; and diffused into the air for breathing into sinuses and lungs (and for cleansing the air itself). Clinical aromatherapy, or aromatic medicine, is practiced extensively in France and England.

As you start your aromatic herbal medicine chest and home cleaning cabinet, don't forget to try natural lavender bath soaps, too. And consider consulting professional aromatherapists and herbalists for treatment regimens and to learn more about applications. For referrals, call holistic or integrative medical clinics in your area.

New relationships

Aromatherapist Patricia Lee of San Rafael, California, knows the power of lavender and other healing essential oils. When you meet Lee, she hands you a cobalt glass spritzer bottle and tells you to shake it, close your eyes, then spray your face. It's a heavenly blend of lavender and orange oils--the insoluble oil droplets suspended in water by the shaking motion. As you

spray, Lee tells you how powerful are the effects of essential oils on your mind and memory. If you've never experienced this before, smelling is believing. You quickly feel rejuvenated, as if new tracks have been laid down across old memories.

Lee has your full attention by the time she opens a beautiful case filled with neatly-arranged little amber bottles. She pulls out lavender, the oil she sometimes uses first in her sessions, and begins a soothing foot massage.

"My clients have shared some profound experiences," she says. "They've improved a broad range of health conditions using lavender and other oils. But it's not surprising. We're starting with a natural therapeutic substance that does the body no harm. When we do daily practices with essential oils, we end up being healthier and often not needing antibiotics and other harmful drugs. The oils are simple to use, yet effective. And they're supportive and nurturing to the body and spirit."

Lee believes that self-care with lavender and other essential oils should include a healing garden. We can benefit from an herbal garden no matter how small--just one plant can inspire us. Plants reconnect us to nature, and as one psychotherapist said, "Plants speak an important nonverbal language to us." Given that the path to health involves strengthening our communication with ourselves and accessing our innate healing powers, the process of reconnecting to nature through the plants themselves can be very healing. Even if you don't have the opportunity to grow any plants, go visit nurseries or gardens in the spring and summer. Run your hand gently up the length of the stem and flowers of a *Lavandula angustifolia* plant, then smell the wonderful scent on your hand. Now compare it with a popular lavandin plant like *Lavandula x intermedia* "Grosso" or 'Super.' Again, run your hand up the length, then inhale the fragrance. You'll be amazed at the differences, and you will, like everyone, develop immediate preferences. It's an unforgettable experience--not to mention a fun outing for children.

So what's the next step for lavender lovers? "Learn to safely blend lavender with other oils to enhance certain of its properties," says Lee. "And remember, we're establishing new relationships here--both with the plant oils and with ourselves. Ultimately, we're developing more confidence and an ability to take care of ourselves."

For "Ye Griefs" Past to Present

At least as far back as biblical times, extracts of aromatics were used for wound healing. In ancient Persia and Greece, lavender was used to fight infections. Dioscorides recommended lavender for "ye griefs in ye thorax." Contrary to popular belief, though, the Romans probably didn't use lavender to scent their baths. Says English herb specialist Anthony Lyman-Dixon of Arne Herbs, "I have been unable to find any reference to lavender as a bath herb. It does not reappear in the literature for another 600 years." By the time of the horrible medieval plagues, however, perfume oils such as lavender were the best antiseptics available. The medical practitioners of the time even carried a little bag filled with aromatics on top of their walking sticks, so that they could inhale them when visiting a contagious case.

In the nineteenth century, before modern medicine took hold, European practitioners were steadily developing methods for treating patients with aromatics and other botanicals. During both World Wars, lavender was extensively used in England as an antiseptic when surgical supplies ran low, says Australian horticulturalist Judyth McLeod. And during World War II, Dr. Jean Valnet, inspired by the work of Dr. René-Maurice Gattefosse, began using essential oils extensively in his treatments. Dr. Valnet went on to publish his landmark book, *Aromatherapie*, in 1964.

French perfume chemist Dr. Gattefosse had made the discovery in 1927 that lavender heals burns. After a laboratory accident, he had thrust his burned hand into a container of pure lavender oil and was soon fascinated to see that the hand not only healed quickly but without scar tissue. Many modern studies of burn patients have confirmed that oil of lavender eases pain, enhances healing and prevents scar tissue from forming.

Unfortunately, after the wars, with the dawning of modern pharmacology and the hegemony of orthodox medicine, botanicals got mostly left behind, especially in the U.S. They were soon thought of as old-fashioned, and plants lost their time-honored holistic value.

In England, aromatherapists such as Robert Tisserand, Shirley Price, Patricia Davis, Jane Buckle and others have carried forward the study and use of lavender. Nurses there are using essential oils in hospitals. In France, Pierre Franchomme and Dr. Daniel Péroël have done extensive work with essential oils. French doctors can actually be certified as aromatherapists, and the oils are widely used for infection control. The oils are used therapeutically in Germany and Switzerland, too.

Aromatherapy is taught in many European medical schools, and in France, doctors can prescribe essential oils and the health insurance companies will pay for them.

Resources

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www.simplers.com