

# Cultural Daily

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## Lavender: The Holistic Total Package

Evelyna Nazari · Wednesday, May 16th, 2018

“Th[e] ancient [lavender] plant is making a modern-day comeback—perhaps to help calm a jittery and uncertain world...” is a quote mentioned in Mt. Shasta’s Lavender Field’s homepage. In a world of incessant hardships, nuclear political climate, and domineering economic conditions, the brunt of society faces the ripples and waves of these issues. Amidst the over-arching turmoil of the present day, taking time to appreciate and immerse oneself in the simpler things in life provides invaluable respite: such as with, specifically, lavenders.

Personally, lavenders have left this initial, soothing impression with me, not even scratching the surface of its functionality. Even phonetically the flower sounds calming. In addition, the discovery of the breathtaking image of the lavender fields by Mt. Shasta inspired me to implement further research into this flora—to ultimately provide others acknowledgement of its myriad of value aside from aroma alone. Through examining the lavender’s historical and environmental context of its nature and growth, the flower’s versatility improves life not only for its own ecosystem, but for humanity as well, boosting an individual person’s quality of life. While analyzing the key features of lavenders, a focus shall also be placed on reviewing and promoting the lavenders of Mt. Shasta, particularly the English and French Lavenders.

To begin, the history and utilization of lavenders begins with the Egyptians. PhD in Plant Physiology Joe-Ann McCoy breaks down the entire historical and taxonomical facets of the lavender. Predating back to around 30<sup>th</sup>BC, some of the plant’s earliest usages took advantage of its fragrant properties for aesthetic value; other uses include using the lavender’s scent to freshen rooms, potentially for religious or spiritual, underlying reasons. McCoy specifies in ancient Egypt that “...[lavenders were] used as a perfume and as an essential ingredient for incense.” At an early historical age, the Egyptians held concern for how they presented themselves, spritzing lavender to either leave a good impression, or maintain hygiene. It wasn’t just the people that got an olfactory upgrade. The use of an incense demonstrates lavender’s potential as much more than a personal taste. Incense becomes a cultural symbol that can bring people together. Lavender raises emotional utility through its pervading sweet aroma within a room, and when combined with an audience, can bring good relations. Thus, at an early age beginning with the Egyptians, lavenders have olfactorily laid down the foundations for its potential to humanity.



Ancient lavender usage pushes further beyond simply cleansing the air, in fact, it cleanses the individual. The name, lavender, derives from the Latin word meaning to wash, or to bathe

(McCoy). In accordance to this, Lavender Sense's article, written by a lavender-growing family business, describes that "...[t]he Romans used lavender to scent their baths, beds, clothes, and even hair" ("History & Uses of Lavender"). McCoy adds to this through the inclusion of Greeks partaking in similar routines as well. For the Greeks and Romans to go to such lengths to engross themselves entirely, essentially, in lavender reaffirms what the Egyptians found in its fragrant potential.

Consequently, lavender empowers the individual, and likely maintains a better mood for the Greek and Romans than without it. Researchers Koulivand et al. validate this with an overview of a multitude of lavender studies. They explain in one study that lavender was capable of elevating mood or maintaining good mood compared to a control group (Koulivand et al. 5). Along a similar vein, they describe in another study that the use of lavender oil for a three month period had sixty-six subjects believe in an improvement in their work environment (5). In mentioning these, the Greek and Romans understood this prior to having modern-day scientific evidence, thus supporting their recreational, hygienic use for it to improve dispositions and productivity. Therefore, even within the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, Greeks and Romans understood the positive impact lavender could possess and ensured to implement it within their lifestyle.

Next, after explaining the lavender's history, a description of its environmental background and appropriate growing conditions come to order. Beginning with origination, Agricultural Specialist Katherine Adam explains that lavenders came about "...around the Mediterranean in poor, rocky soils, and mild coastal climates." Lavender Sense's article adds to this by including the Middle East and India to areas of origination ("History & Uses of Lavender"). From then, lavenders have spread to different parts of the world. Present-day areas that cultivate lavenders include the initial areas of origin, along with Europe, Australia, New Zealand, North America, and South America ("History & Uses of Lavender"). Even with lavenders spreading to different parts of the world, the flower species retain one commonality—similar foundational growing conditions.

Lavenders have certain environmental factors that need to be considered to ensure a successful growth. McCoy describes that the soil needs to be well-drained, growing best in light soil, sand, or gravel in a dry, open, or sunny condition; yet, lavenders need more than just good weather conditions. Elevation comes into play: they need to be on a slope facing south or south-east (McCoy). Adam explains that elevation increases the plant's chance of survival. On top, good air flow is integral to its growth and discouragement of developing fungal pathogens (McCoy). Watering and soil pH must be considered as well. For optimal growing conditions, lavenders necessitate soil pH's surmounting anywhere from 6.4-8.3 (McCoy), while not being overwatered (Adam). So, lavenders require a handful of environmental conditions to consider, such as weather, elevation, air quality, and pH to ensure the plant's successful growth.

Diving back into the lavender's functionality, first, the flora collaborates with its ecosystem through helping the bee population. In general, bees not only create honey, but distribute pollen as natural pollinators, promoting more plant growth without artificial meddling. Editor and co-author of bee-related works Alison Benjamin writes that "Lavender is one of the most popular garden plants among bees." Although specific bee preferences vary for how much nectar and pollen is acquired, the Lavender Grower Association explains that bees are less discriminatory overall in choosing a lavender to pollinate from ("Lavender and Bees"). Bumblebees and other wild bee species are threatened by habitat loss (Benjamin), so planting and maintaining lavenders is one integral method to succoring the bee population. Without these natural pollinators, the ecosystem's natural hierarchy will tear apart at the seams, starting at the bottom with reduced new plant growth.

Crumbling the base of the ecological food chain, the effect then extends to insects, herbivores, carnivores, and so forth. And so, lavenders act not only as good sources of pollen and nectar for bees, but are integral to preserving the environmental harmony of life within an ecosystem.

As touched upon with the ancient history, lavenders have two primary modern uses that individuals may utilize the flora: recreational and medicinal. A few recreational purposes for lavender include its use in specialty foods (Adam), dried ornamental use, cut flower use, or essential oil production, (McCoy).

Beginning with recreational usage, lavenders can be employed in foods or ornamentation. According to Lavender Sense, lavenders deliver a floral, slightly sweet, yet elegant flavor (“History & Uses of Lavender”). For consumption, they may be used as pastry toppers, or implemented inside of a recipe to create a unified, fragrant taste. Food, in general, reigns in satisfaction for the mass of society, creating a sense of pleasure and community between the recipe and recipient. With lavender specifically, its aromatic quality would bolster the recipe it’s encased in, thereby enhancing the positive reaction consumption elicits. Next, in the case of dried, ornamental use, using the English Lavender, identified as the *Lavendula angustifolia*, works best since its flowers persist on the stems when dry (McCoy). Floral enthusiasts or floral appreciators may find that dried lavenders act as gentle, enamoring visual stimuli that evokes pleasure within a home or room of habitation. Lavenders in food and ornamentation then are two of the possible ways one can utilize the flower.



“Lavender-scented Reverie”

Regarding the next set of recreational uses, such as for cut flower use or essential oil production, they differ in the type of lavender used, but raise life quality all the same. Cut flower use, such as potpourri production, is best exemplified through the French Lavender, or *Lavendula denata*. Ancient Egyptian’s modern day incense, potpourri can accomplish a similar feat of freshening while lightening a room’s mood olfactorily. The English Lavender is a likely candidate for essential oil production due to their finer fragrance, but, ironically, have a lower oil production (Adam). The hybrid lavender called Lavandin, or formally known as *Lavendula x intermedia* (McCoy), extracts a better quantity of oil, but with less fragrance, so the Lavandin oil is commonly mixed with the English Lavender oil to compliment the potency while retaining a strong fragrance (Adam). Using essential oils can promote relaxation, comfort, or serenity if applied diluted to the skin, or added to a bath or towel compress. While not eliminating all woes and pains, lavenders acts as a start to self-care, a strong proponent in raising an individual’s quality of life.

As mentioned prior, lavender have a second main usage for humans, i.e. medical purposes. Medicinal functions may include alleviating pain or promoting a sense of ease. Starting with the factor of pain, lavender oil has a multitude of benefits, such as having antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties (“History & Uses of Lavender”). Lavender Sense reveals that lavender oil ameliorates pain such as through soothing migraines, headaches, or motion sickness when applied to the temples (“History & Uses of Lavender”). Koulivand et al. reaffirm this notion similarly in describing a study where inhaling lavender oil reduced the pain severity and associated symptoms of migraines within fifteen minutes in forty-seven patients (5). Both evidence nod to promoting a holistic, alternative approach to pain-healing through safe, non-allopathic means. Trying to find natural means of medicine is preferential over artificial means since its raw properties react better with the body. In another study, acupuncture of lavender oil to thirty-two individuals with neck

pain and sixty-one individuals with back pain saw improved movements of the cervical and lumbar spine within eight sessions (Koulivand et al. 5). Lavender oil has many avenues of application, all of which prove useful minimally in the short-term. Hence, the lavender provides promising medical alleviation that can cater to an individual's health situation, better health then equating to a better quality of life.

Lavender's second prime medical use includes soothing the body or mind's troubles. Generally, one may use lavender oil to help with sleep or relaxation. In single-blind randomized studies, use of lavender scent correlated with improved mean scores of sleep quality in fifteen healthy students, sixty-four ischemic heart disease patients, and in thirty-four midlife women with insomnia (Koulivand et al. 4). The scent provides a distraction from deterring thoughts while creating a physiological reaction that compliments intentions of slumber. Lavender helps with more than just sleep; in fact, it can be implemented in the care regime for those who have a moderate form of generalized anxiety. Koulivand et al. explicate on how inhalation of the oil via aromatherapy produced an anxiolytic effect superior to a placebo in 221 patients suffering from anxiety (3). The inhaled compounds produce psychological effects that release chemicals to induce calmness. A pain-free, calm body indicates a typical state of homeostasis that individuals strive to be in. To summarize, lavender utilization for medical purposes include pain-alleviating and relaxing properties that can mold towards an individual's lifestyle.

Although medically useful, a few shortcoming need to be addressed prior to long-term considerations of lavender usage. First, in the aforementioned studies, they work on the short-term for milder issues. For chronic issues of such instances, further research needs to be conducted to verify and validate longstanding effects of lavender. In addition, Koulivand et al. reveal some reports of adverse effects of lavender application, such as young males developing excess breast tissue called gynecomastia (5). The issue resolved after discontinuation (5), but due to lavender's estrogenic properties, further studies would need to be conducted to also observe any additional effects upon humans, or males in particular. Therefore, lavender use works ideally for the short term, in milder cases of pain or other mental health issues, but not for chronic, severe stages.

Despite the multitudes of functions lavenders have after obtaining them, one doesn't have to acquire the flora to enjoy it. Specifically, visiting the flower, such as at Mt. Shasta's Lavender Farm, can evoke just as much emotional utility. First, as an overview, Mt. Shasta's Lavender Farm is located in Northern California, about twenty minutes away from Mt. Shasta. They grow two types of lavenders for oil, ornamentation, and culinary use ("About Us"). Although they don't specify the kinds, Gardner and Business Owner Gerhard Bock identifies that they grow English and French Lavenders. Bock also touches upon the soil quality of Mt. Shasta, explaining that it's rocky and extremely well-draining, with the air being dry. English Lavender's especially do poorly in humid climates (McCoy), so the Lavender Farm's current draining and rocky conditions compliment the needed circumstances to ensure a lavender's growth. As an added note, the rocky soil of Mt. Shasta parallels the flora's Mediterranean rocky soil origins, furthering the appropriate environment to ideally grow in.

Yet, in order to visit, individuals must adhere to the Farm's schedule of operation, assuming environmental conditions are sustainable for the year. Implied by Bock's recount, the farms have minimally been open since the early 2000's. However, the farm does not open the field year-round. In fact, the Lavender Farm opens only during June and July to coincide with the natural period of lavenders blooming (Bock). If visited around those summer months, the view of the Lavender Fields brings a sense of ambient ease, some samples displayed in Brock's blog page. In a sea of

lavender, the farm lies as a hidden, promising spectacle for Northern California. To further showcase the farm's captivating properties, the blends of pink and purple color palettes compliment the mystifying and awe-inspiring mood evoked from the Mt. Shasta.



from [Mt Shasta Lavender Farms](#)

Alas, for 2018, the farm is closed for the third time, this year due to poor weather condition. Mt. Shasta's Facebook page explains that due to "several season of less than ideal weather... extremely cold winters and very hot, dry summers" plant growth has delayed severely. As a result, they've chosen to distill their current harvest of lavenders for products. Despite the current situation in Mt. Shasta's Lavender Farms, not all hope is withered in trying to visit lavenders in person.

Mt. Shasta's future does hold potential for a re-opening. The farm workers diligently tend to the lavenders and place the condition of the flowers above all. From the beginning of the founding up until now, Bock describes in a personal recollection that Mt. Shasta's fields have been piecemeal expanding, with more and more work being done. Likely the farm has had a lapses in openings due to similar weather conditions since then, but that doesn't deter the employees from upholding the current harvest of flowers. In demonstrating the farm's perseverance, their post, in the least, holds merit that the farm will make a dedicated effort to tend to the plants as best as they can, regardless of weather conditions. Thus, with the ever-changing environmental conditions, optimism remains in looking forward towards the farm's re-opening for further years to come due to their diligence and authenticity.

More can be done for the Lavender Farms than just with the workers alone, even an individual, or reader, can contribute to the cause. One method would be to financially support them, through purchasing items on their online store. The money received could not only go to compensation of workers, but potentially to purchasing needed materials for maintaining the Lavender Farm. However, money is not the only way an individual can aid the Farm's efforts. Even spreading the news about their business, such as with word-of-mouth referrals can be just as effective. Gaining more foot traffic would help expand their current population outreach, providing a higher chance for the farm to reinvest profits into bettering the fields. At no cost to the individual, a single person can make a huge difference through their spheres of influence to Mt. Shasta's Lavender Farms. Hence, even with little effort, one person can make a big impact on the future success and preservation of the farm.

To draw to a close, lavender's have copious features that whether used or visited leave an impact on the individual. Reviewing its historical usages provides a basis for society to understand its timeline and creates a first impression as to its scope of potential. Lavender growing requires a few conditions for a successful growth; if lavenders achieve a healthy upbringing, then the surrounding ecosystem, and humanity, benefit from it. Discussing its modern-day application reaffirms this benefit, exemplifying recreational or medicinal properties, both of which promote life quality through increasing emotional utility, alleviating pain, or soothing the body or mind. Even if utilized for the short-term, the benefits provided outweigh the allopathic alternative to physical or emotional healing. Then, honing into the Mt. Shasta's Lavender Farms, the business provides a valuable opportunity to view lavenders in person, whether to simply behold them or harvest them for personal use.

Amidst all this research, I feel much more enlightened and appreciative of the lavender flower.

Aside from overt reasons due to the mere research alone, I only had a superficial understanding of the lavender entity. Knowing that it smells nice and looks aesthetically pleasing certainly fulfills one of its impressionable traits; however, lavenders contain much deeper properties that humans haven't fully given its attention to. Much of today's society succumbs to unhealthy escapism, internalization, or addiction to deal with the tribulations of the present day. Yet, with the lavender's widespread versatility, it truly behaves as the total holistic package, an amicable gift ready to be opened to leave a sweet, aromatic, and alleviating mark on society.

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