

Diploma in Animal Sensory Enrichment

**Plant Assignment Two 29th
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**Lavandula angustifolia
(Lavender)**

by

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Photograph of *Lavandula angustifolia*

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Lavandula angustifolia

Identification and Background Information

It is thought that both the common and generic names for Lavender derive from the Latin ***lavare***, to wash, because the Roman's and Carthaginian's put lavender in their bath water, both for its fragrance and therapeutic properties.

The antiseptic and disinfectant properties of the plant have been acknowledged since ancient times and lavender had many uses including that of a strewing herb scattered amongst clothes and linen to keep moths at bay.

It was similarly hung in rooms to deter flies and mosquitoes and was also used in the effective treatment of some snake bites.

(Herbs; Roger Phillips and Nicky Foy; Pan Limited 1992).

Lavandula angustifolia, or Common Lavender also known as English Lavender, is native to the Mediterranean region, and was introduced to the British Isles by the Romans and is also referred to as both ***lavandula spica*** and ***lavandula officinalis***.

(Herbs; Roger Phillips and Nicky Foy; Pan Limited 1992).

Monks then began to cultivate lavender in their monastic gardens but it did not become popular until Tudor times, when the general population became aware of its pleasant scent and its remarkable ability to alleviate painful joints and fatigue.

Vast quantities of the plant were then transported from rural herb farms to the London Herb Market at Bucklesbury and consequently “**who will buy my lavender**” became the most familiar of all London Street cries.

Its popularity had much to do with its effectiveness in disguising unpleasant house hold and street smells, both of which were rife within the city at the time.

It also enjoyed widespread use in small floral bouquets called nosegays, which were often tied at the waist, as it was thought to ward off the plague and other contagious diseases.

It is still much in demand to-day for an array of uses and the lavender fields of France first planted in the 17th century to supply the perfume trade and meet the then ever growing demand for this versatile plant, are still in existence to-day.

(Jekka's Complete Herb Book; Jekka McVicar; Kyle Cathie Limited 1994).

French Lavender or *lavandula stoechas* is found in dry sandy areas of Mediterranean Europe and is a small shrub with velvety whitish leaves and pretty dark purple flowers which may well have been the variety used by the Romans in their baths.

It smells more like rosemary than other lavenders and is not generally used for distillation purposes for this reason.

The plant itself is a hardy, evergreen, perennial mountain shrub, native to the mainly hilly or mountainous regions of the western Mediterranean, but it is now grown all over the world, for the perfume trade, its medicinal properties, ornamental garden purposes and also increasingly importantly, as a bee-friendly plant.

Honey made from bees that have visited lavender is much sought after for its distinctive taste.

Lavender has a short much branched stem with numerous, straight, woody, quadrangular, downy, grey branches which can reach heights of 100cm or 40 inches, with a spread of approximately one metre or three feet.

It has stalk-less, narrow, pale greyish green, aromatic leaves and blueish-violet coloured flowers which grow in dense whorls to form a spike, blooming from June to August.

Lavender is very easy to grow in the garden and can either be grown from seed or propagated from autumn cuttings, kept under cover in winter in compost and planted out the following spring in an open sunny position.

The bush should be pruned after flowering to encourage denser growth.

Flowers should be harvested as they are coming into bloom, tied up and hung in small bundles to dry.

The dried flowers are then added to pot pourri and made into lavender bags, whilst dried sprigs can be used to make infusions of various strengths.

“Lavender oil can be made by placing fresh flowers in olive oil in an air tight jar and leaving these to macerate for three days in the sun. The oil should then be strained

through muslin several times to obtain a highly perfumed oil which can be taken internally to relieve migraines and nervous indigestion.

It can be used externally as a lotion or compresses for burns, eczema and bronchitis."

(Herbs; Roger Phillips and Nicky Foy; Pan Limited 1992).

The biggest killer of lavenders are root-rotting diseases, caused by humidity and wet soils and this is particularly true of the English Lavenders.

The best soil for growing is therefore a gritty or sandy loam, with a Ph factor between 6.0 and 8.0.

In France lavender grows naturally in well-drained limestone and stony ground but any light well drained soils will be suitable for lavender growing.

Where the soil is heavier or more clay-based lavender can be grown in raised beds or mounds, where crushed granite or chicken grit has been incorporated into the top twelve inches of soils cover.

Ample organic matter should also be added to promote soil aeration and lime will need to be included to increase the Ph levels of clay soils to make them more friable (crumbly). Lavender will tolerate "wet feet" for a short period after heavy rains if the ground is fast draining accommodating rapid water removal.

(www.lavenderenchantment.com).

Medicinal Properties, Actions and Common Uses

Lavender possesses the following properties, **anti-depressive, anti-bacterial, astringent, analgesic, anti-spasmodic, anti-convulsive, anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-pruritic (anti-itch), carminative (calms the stomach and aids the release of gas), deodorant, diuretic, relaxant, stimulant, tonic, vermifuge (worm expelling), vulnery (wound healing).**

These properties can be utilised to treat associated conditions in both plants and animals alike and modern scientific research has confirmed the various medicinal properties assigned to lavender.

When taken as a mild infusion (5-10g of dried sprigs to 1litre boiling water left to infuse for five minutes) it has a sedative, anti-spasmodic and tranquillising effect and can be taken for headaches, insomnia, fainting, nervous digestion, flatulence, nausea, convulsions and colic.

A stronger infusion of 30g to the same amount of water acts as a tonic and stimulant and can be given for respiratory complaints, tonsillitis, chills, influenza and fever.

Externally it can be used as a compress or lotion for burns, infected wounds, eczema, dermatitis and acne.

A tincture strengthens hair, prevents hair loss and relieves rheumatism and painful joints.

Lavender is added to Elizabeth Whiter's insect repellent due to its skin soothing properties, its anti-bacterial and astringent actions, plus it is a highly effective relaxant and helps to calm nervous or anxious animals during the application of the repellent. ([Elizabeth Whiter 2013: Certificate in Natural Food Animal Remedies](#)).

The essential oil when extracted from the plant acts as a powerful antiseptic which kills many modern bacteria including diphtheria, typhoid, streptococcus and pneumococcus. ([Herbs; Roger Phillips and Nicky Foy; Pan Limited 1992](#)).

The essential oil is also used in the treatment of psychological symptoms such as anxiety, mood swings, fear and paranoia.

It is also highly effective in counteracting stress and depression as it has as a calming and mood lifting effect, working equally well for people and animals and it can alter attitudes in aggressive animals by counteracting the underlying fear, anger or frustration involved. (www.fiascofarm.com/herbs).

When an animal smells lavender or any essential oil the molecules pass through the olfactory system to the limbic area of the brain.

This is the area of the brain which deals with emotions, behaviours and survival instincts, such as the "fight or flight response". (www.biology.about.com)

As the underlying principle of holistic medicine is that the mind and body are one unit it is therefore recognised that the mind has a huge influence on the health of the body.

Recent science agrees that inhalation can now be a direct and effective way of delivering medication to the body and much research has been done into the effect of fragrance on the psyche and in particular how certain smells trigger memories.

Lavender will therefore work on an animals mind and body together to effectively reduce stress, which has been identified as one of the biggest triggers of dis-ease in the body, whilst simultaneously delivering tiny amounts of healing compounds directly into the system. (www.essentialanimals.com)

All animals in the wild possess the ability to forage and self medicate by selecting those plants which have the healing properties they require for any particular ailment as I have learnt by observing animals self-select a variety of macerated oils and it is this ability which is similarly utilised in the science of zoopharmacognosy, where animals are treated using a selection of essential oils, including lavender.

As with macerated oils the animals will react differently to each essential oil sniffing, processing, expressing further interest by trying to lick the oils or indicating that they would like them applied to certain body parts by moving into your hand or pointing with their noses.

They may also back away from a particular oil and they should never be prevented from doing so, particularly as certain oils may evoke unpleasant memories or emotions, especially in rescue or traumatised animals.

Although essential oils such as lavender are natural substances they should never the less

be used with respect and never without your animals permission, as is the case with macerated oils.

Lavender can be used in blends for many common animal ailments but is partly suited to any application that is required for skin conditions, first-aid and healing purposes.

The supreme gentleness of the oil in combination with anti-bacterial, anti-pruritic (anti-itch) and powerful regenerative properties make lavender a perfect choice for these specific uses.

The oils also acts on the central nervous system, hence its amazing calming properties and it has been used effectively to treat behavioural issues and depression.

(Kirsten Leigh Bell; [Holistic Aromatherapy for Animals; A Comprehensive Guide to the Use of Essential Oils and Hydrosols with Animals; Findhorn Press; 2002](#))

Utilising essential oils in this way increases the trust between an animal and their guardians.

This is because we have inadvertently removed our animals autonomy through the process of domestication and by offering them choice we afford them a higher level of respect, which in turn increases their level of trust in us.

This approach has a particularly beneficial effect in the case of abused or traumatised animals as the experience of being given a voice and having it listened to, is an effective empowerment technique and thereby therapeutic and healing in its own right.

(www.essentialanimals.com)

Spiritually lavender provides greater intuition and clarity and promotes the opening of the Heart and Crown chakras.

The Heart chakra represents unconditional love, friendship, compassion, harmony, balance, happiness, caring and sharing, life force and empathy, all the things that characterise what animals give freely to us, their guardians.

It is also the chakra through which animals release and let go of emotional issues, such as rejection, abuse and grief and if this chakra is blocked the consequent release is prevented, so the use of lavender oil helps with the process of emotional release by allowing this chakra to open, restoring the flow of energy, allowing the animal to heal and move on.

(Elizabeth Whiter; [Diploma in Animal Healing; 2005 updated 2013; page 23](#)).

Similarly the Crown chakra is associated with infinity, bliss, enlightenment, peace with oneself and others, acceptance and light and links the personality and soul of the animal, with its higher self and the Source.

(Elizabeth Whiter; [Diploma in Animal Healing; 2005 updated 2013; page 24](#)).

If this chakra is blocked an animal becomes depressed and listless, so once again the use of lavender oil to promote opening of this chakra and the rebalancing of the energy flow allows us to see why it effectively combats the effects of depression and uplifts an animals mood.

It is therefore apparent that the many and varied uses of lavender in the treatment of

animals and their human guardians is not to be under-estimated.

**Honour the Earth.
Give Glory to the Creator.
Cherish that sweet connection with the plants.
And your medicine power will be deep and strong.**

(Nancy & Michael Phillips;The Herbalist's Way;Chelsea Green Publishing Company 2005).

Learning Outcomes

1. **Identify and harvest local culinary herbs specific to this course.**
2. **How to use fresh and dry herbs for simple remedies**
3. **Equipment needed, drying and storage of herbs.**
4. How to create a herb garden.
5. How to use specific culinary Macerated Oils; Nettle, Marigold, Rose-hip, Mint, Catnip, Chickweed, and Seaweed infused oils and cold pressed Linseed Oil.
6. Create delicious, culinary, herbal pet treats specific to this course.
7. **Make simple animal topical preparations such as insect repellent and cooling gel using plants, herbs, clays and honey.**
8. **Have a clear understanding of what animal self-selection is and how animals can benefit from an enhanced, nutritional, healthy, balanced diet, containing plant material.**
9. Able to work and communicate with pet owners vets and other healthcare professionals.
10. How to keep professional standard records of all animal self-selection sessions undertaken.
11. Be aware of the importance of personal and animal safety as well as the relevant insurance, the law and vet liaison.
12. **Be able to observe and understand why animals self-select culinary macerated oils/herbs/clays/honey specific to this course at animal rescue centres and with private clients.**
13. Be aware of when not to conduct an animal self-selection session.
14. **Be more aware of yourself as an animal healer and consider how and when you**

will use your training and experience from this course.

Bibliography

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