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Munstead Lavender Herb

A Fragrant History and Usage



Introduction

Munstead Lavender is a beloved variety of English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) known for its compact growth, vibrant purple flowers, and delightful fragrance. Named after Gertrude Jekyll's garden at Munstead Wood in Surrey, England, this herb has become a favorite among gardeners and herbalists alike.

History and Origin

Lavandula angustifolia, commonly known as English lavender, has a rich history dating back to ancient times. The name "lavender" is derived from the Latin word "lavare," meaning "to wash," indicative of its early use in bathing and hygiene. Munstead Lavender itself was cultivated by the renowned horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll in the late 19th century. Jekyll, known for her contributions to garden design and her influential writings, selected this particular variety for its hardiness, compact form, and striking color.

Botanical Characteristics

Munstead Lavender is a perennial herb that typically grows to a height of 12 to 18 inches, making it one of the more compact lavender varieties. The plant exhibits silver-green foliage and produces spikes of aromatic, deep purple flowers in mid to late summer. Its foliage is evergreen, providing year-round interest in the garden, while the flowers attract bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

Growth Habits

Munstead Lavender thrives in well-drained soil and full sun, preferring alkaline to neutral soil conditions. It is drought-resistant once established, making it an ideal choice for xeriscaping and low-water gardens. Regular pruning helps maintain the plant's shape and encourages more prolific blooming.

Uses and Benefits

Lavender has been cherished for its myriad of uses and benefits, from culinary to medicinal to ornamental.

Culinary Uses

Munstead Lavender can be used in various culinary applications. Its flowers add a subtle, floral flavor to dishes and can be used in baked goods, teas, and salads. Lavender-infused honey and syrups are also popular, adding a unique twist to beverages and desserts.

Medicinal Uses

Lavender has long been recognized for its therapeutic properties. It is widely used in aromatherapy for its calming and relaxing effects. Lavender essential oil is believed to help alleviate stress, anxiety, and insomnia. Additionally, lavender has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties, making it useful in treating minor burns, insect bites, and skin irritations.

Ornamental Uses

Munstead Lavender is a favorite in garden design due to its attractive appearance and fragrant blooms. It is often used in borders, rock gardens, and as a ground cover. The dried flowers can be utilized in crafting, such as making wreaths, potpourri, and sachets.

Growing and Care

Cultivating Munstead Lavender is relatively straightforward given its hardy nature. Here are some tips for growing and caring for this delightful herb:

- **Planting:** Choose a location with full sun and well-drained soil. Amend soil with lime to maintain appropriate pH levels.
- **Watering:** Water the plants regularly during their first growing season to establish a strong root system. Once established, reduce watering frequency.
- **Pruning:** Prune the plants annually after flowering to encourage bushy growth and prevent leggy stems. Remove spent flowers to promote continued blooming.
- **Winter Care:** Munstead Lavender is generally frost-tolerant but may benefit from mulching in colder climates to protect the roots.

Conclusion

Munstead Lavender is a versatile and beautiful herb that offers a range of benefits and uses. Whether incorporated into culinary dishes, used for its medicinal properties, or admired in the garden, this lavender variety continues to enchant and delight. Its rich history, ease of cultivation, and fragrant presence make it a valuable addition to any herbal collection or garden landscape.