

'The Swiss Army knife of herbs'

Versatile lavender thriving at 13-acre farm in Streetsboro

Tucked into the rolling hills of Portage County, our 13-acre DayBreak Lavender Farm at 9292 Market Square Drive in Streetsboro was officially designated by the Ohio State Senate "the first lavender farm in Ohio's history" in 2004, three years after its founding.

Here at DayBreak Farm, we follow the Native American seventh generation philosophy farming and gardening so that in seven generations the land will be better than it is today. That means using only ecologically responsible, organic, and sustainable agricultural principles and products.

There are over 600 varieties of lavender grown around the world; there are 30 that are hardy here in Ohio. We grow 13 different varieties of lavender — my favorite is Grosso.

We use our lavender to produce a variety of handmade soaps, creams, and botanical bath and body products as well as chocolates, teas, and preserves. Jody, my wife and partner, calls this amazing perennial "the Swiss Army Knife of herbs" because it can be used in so many ways — in healing, decor, culinary, crafts, scent, and aromatherapy.

Because so many home gardeners grow and love lavender, we are often asked about the care and management of these plants. It's worth doing it right because a well-situated, carefully groomed plant can bloom beautifully for up to 10 years!

At this time of year the question arises as to prune or not to prune. It's a hotly debated topic among lavender growers across the country. Here in Ohio, at DayBreak Lavender Farm, we prune shortly after we have harvested all of the flowers and bunched them for drying.

Don't let flower stems linger on your plant. They'll sap energy that should go for strong roots and flower-bearing foliage.

Pruning after peak bloom gives the plant some time to recover before next year's bloom and removes excess plant material that may tend to hold in moisture within the interior of the plant over the winter. Pruning shapes and pushes the plant to increase bud production and keeps it from becoming leggy and woody looking.

Actually, pruning after harvest helps the plant weather over through winter.

Removing excess plant material allows natu-

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PORTAGE

Michael Slyker
Portage Park District



ral circulation which helps to dry and wick away moisture. Root rot, caused by excess moisture, is the No. 1 problem with lavender plants. A combination of well drained soil and properly pruned plants reduces the chance of damaged roots.

You decide which pruning level is right for your lavender plant.

■ **Light:** Pruning foliage only, remove 2 inches from new growth.

■ **Moderate:** Cut out 3 woody stems. With a clock face in mind, cut a stem at 12, one at 4 and the last at 8. Then cut the entire plant back about 2-3 inches.

■ **Severe:** Only leave 2 to 3 inches of green past the woody stem. It helps keep plants tight and compact. Good for middle aged plants.

■ **Radical:** For plants so woody you're wondering if you should toss them, try this. Prune them so just 6 inches of woody stems are sticking out. If they like their location, in two years, they will fill in nicely. Or not. This is risky. You could lose the plant, but then you were thinking about tossing it, right?

For lavender in pots that stay out all winter, cut back any winter burn in spring.

Lavender hates wet feet and that is the same in the winter. As long as the pots have good drainage, the snow should not harm them. Or your in-ground plants. A snow cover provides protection from drying winds and a bit of moisture on sunny winter days.

Michael Slyker is co-founder of DayBreak Lavender Farm with his wife Jody. Michael is happy to answer your questions at: mislyker1@aol.com. If you'd like to visit the farm next year, during Lavender Harvest, check out www.ohiolavenderfestival.com for details, maps and weather updates. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier and the Portage Park District.

OPINION

Record-Courier

WEDNESDAY

AUGUST 8, 2012

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