

BLGC Talk on Saturday February 17th by Alison Marks on “Lavender Outside Of The Mediterranean”

Report prepared by David Oldacre - a member of the Brome Lake Garden Club

Information from the BLGC Announcement

Alison Marks, co-owner of Joie de Lavande lavender farm in Knowlton with her husband Christopher, talks about growing “LAVENDER OUTSIDE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN”! Alison, who recently retired from the corporate world in various marketing/managerial positions, is now using her entrepreneurial skills in managing their farm which has turned into a local popular tourist destination. With its picturesque pond, and 1000 lavender plants, including an interpretive garden and sunny lavender scented terrace in a lavender and white colour scheme, it is no wonder that this property is lending itself well as a wedding and special events venue. Alison, also part of the floral partnership Fleurissima, and well known as the flower lady at the Knowlton Farmer’s Market, will take us through the trials and tribulations of growing one of the world’s oldest herbs in our climate.

Here are my notes on this talk

Alison Marks is a BLGC member who in recent years has established a farm Joie de Lavande at 50 Mont Echo Road which specialises in growing lavender. There were about 40 people in attendance, and it was a well organized and interesting talk mainly focussing on the growing and use of the lavender plant itself, as well as their property as a meeting place for a variety of functions. Their website is: www.joiedelavande.com

The development of the property

Purchase of the Property

Alison and her husband Chris bought the property in 2006, and established it as a farm with 1000 Lavender plants, a centre for tourism and a venue for weddings and other events.

Visits to Luberon, France and Washington State

In order to understand the process, they visited Luberon in Provence, France which is well known its massive fields of lavender. Some farms have as many as 300,000 plants. They also visited Washington State (which is known as the Lavender capital of the USA) in order to research business practices.

At Luberon, the farms are mostly vertically integrated with all of the various processes being done under one organisation.

In Washington, the farms are smaller, and some of them specialise in only one or two of the processes required to bring the finished lavender products to the market.

Alison and Chris selected the Washington State model for their own business.

The Farm and the Boutique

The farm and boutique are open from June to October, and visitors are welcome to picnic there. Artists and families gatherings are also very welcome, but if photographs are to be taken they prefer that this is done by a professional photographer.

In spring and summer they sell lavender plants which are hardy in Zone 4

Activities for the visitor

- Picnic or simply stay awhile in Adirondack chairs
- Encourage visitors to smell and touch the lavender
- Pick small souvenir bouquets
- Visit the boutique
- Take photos and paint or sketch
- Nominal fee for classes

Special Events

- Weddings
- Family reunions
- etc.

The Lavender Plant

Lavender is an aromatic herb which is originally from the Mediterranean as far as Egypt

The name *Lavandula* comes from the Latin Verb "Lavare" which means to wash. This alludes to the ancient Roman custom of using lavender when having a bath.

The plant is a perennial with shrubby square stems and narrow evergreen leaves

Spiky dark purple flowers bloom in late June and July

The blooms are sparsely arranged on tips of bare stems which produce small nutlike fruits

The fragrance of the plant is caused by shining oil glands

Lavender is a provenance of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*) which comprises 236 genera and over 7000 species.

It grows all over the world

According to the Wikipedia entry at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavandula>

"It is native to the Old World and is found from Cape Verde and the Canary Islands, Europe across to northern and eastern Africa, the Mediterranean, southwest Asia to southeast India. Many members of the genus are cultivated extensively in temperate climates as ornamental plants for garden and landscape use, for use as culinary herbs, and also commercially for the extraction of essential oils."

Cultivated Species of Lavender

Main species of cultivated lavender

- English Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- French Lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) **Note: This is referred to as Spanish Lavender in the USA**
- Woolly Lavender (*Lavandula lanata*)

and there are at least 75 cultivars from these species

Angustifolia Cultivars

- Twickle Purple
- Lady Munstead (Zone 4)
- Pacific Blue (Zone 4)
- Hidcote
- Folgate

Angustifolia x Intermedia Hybrid Cultivars

- Grosso Fred Boutin, Arabian Nights
- Seal Super

Most of these cultivars are Zone 5

Alison and Chris are growing Grosso Cultivars and are going to try Boutin as well

Origin and Uses

Lavender is native to the entire Mediterranean and appears to have originated from Rome. It travelled with the soldiers of the Roman legions, and later the Christian monks who planted lavender to use it as a cure for the sick

Cleansing

- Flower heads were used in Roman baths both for their scent and their healing and anti-bacterial properties
- Fragrant lavender water was spread over white linen

Healing Properties

- Lavender can be used for relieving headaches, insomnia, depression and has several useful properties. It can be used as an anti-bacterial agent, an anti-fungal agent, for burn healing and as an insect repellent.

MY NOTE: The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) states that lavender is considered likely safe in food amounts and possibly safe in medicinal amounts. But it does identify precautions for some people. This is explained more fully under the Wikipedia website entry for *Lavandula* (see above)

Lavender Oil

- Lavender oil is obtained from a distillate of flowers, stems, and leaves. The oil is a colourless or yellow liquid
- It contains Linalyl acetate, linalool, pulegone, limonene, geraniol, cineole **(MY NOTE I am not sure about the spellings of some of these names)**
- It is an Essential oil which you can put directly on to your skin without dilution

Uses of Lavender in History

- It is a favourite of royalty
- The Queen of Sheba and King Solomon are reported to have used it
- It was mentioned often in the Bible where it is referred to as Spikenard. The Greek name for spikenard is nardos (νάρδος)
- King Charles VI of France insisted that his cushions should be stuffed with lavender
- Louis XIV carried sprigs of lavender
- Queen Elizabeth I used a lavender conserve (jam) at every meal
- Victorian England created a very big demand for lavender

There is an interesting website on the history of lavender at

<https://everything-lavender.com/history-of-lavender.html>

Lavender in North America

Lavender was brought to North America by the first English settlers who planted it in kitchen and herb gardens. It has also been found on the graves of the first Shakers (the strict sect of English Quakers) who came to the US and Canada somewhat later.

Herb Society of America

This society has been instrumental in clarifying where lavender can be grown

The West coast of the US has a hot and dry climate which is similar to that of the Mediterranean. The west side of the Olympic Mountains is rather too wet, but the east side is quite dry.

It is much more difficult to grow on the NE coast which has high humidity and harsh winter conditions. Humidity causes fungal infections which eventually cause the plant to die. The cold weather, usually brings snow, but that is good cover for over-wintering lavender.

Local Suppliers of Lavender in Quebec

Pure Lavande - St Eustache

Joie de Lavande – Knowlton

Bleu Lavande – Fitch Bay, Stansted

Zone 4 Cultivars

- Hidcote About 15" high with deep purple flower on grey foliage
- Munstead About 17" high with pale purple flowers and grey/green foliage

They are edible when dried (before they open up) and can be used with Lemon Leaf, in Lavender Ice cream, and you can cook chicken with it

Growing Considerations:

Propagation

- Growing from seeds is not recommended
- Cuttings from mother plant will produce a viable plant within 5-7 weeks
- Tissue culture is recommended for tens to thousands of identical plants which retain all of the dominant characteristics of the source plant
- Layering - bend the long stems of lavender down to the soil and hold in place

Soils

- Non acidic soil (ph= 6-7)
- Full sun, well drained, sandy and rocky
- So much the better if it is on a slope
- Good drainage on a small hill of sandy and gravelly soil, and put lots of white rocks around to attract and retain the heat of the sun
- Lavender plants live 10-15 years
- It needs about 3ft of sandy/gravelly soil - dig a trench or hole – because lavender has a long root system which seeks water

Planting

- Seedlings must be watered frequently
- Allow soil to dry out between waterings
- Second year plants – they do not need watering but ensure that the plants do not completely dry out
- In subsequent years, only water when the plants are showing signs of water stress

- You can buy 1-2 year old plants of a respectable size at a reputable green house such as Richters.

Pruning

- Cutting a flowering stalk after the June/July bloom can stimulate a secondary bloom at the end of September.
- In colder areas – where there is good snow coverage - prune back the dead wood in late fall (October or later)

Protection

- Site selection: Shelter from prevailing winds using hedges, trees, or buildings
- Cover with burlap or a breathable cloth
- Mulching is NOT recommended - it can get too soggy and will eventually kill the plant. However hardwood chips are best but do not put these down until the ground is frozen. They should be removed after 15 consecutive nights (presumably of warmer weather in the Spring)

Question Period

- Q1 White Lavender Cultivars (*Lavandula x intermedia* 'Alba' i.e. White Grosso Lavender) You have to check the label that this is good for Zone 4 or Zone 5 areas. Richters has a fantastic selection. They are located in Ontario, just north of Toronto and they have a nice catalog which you can obtain through their website at:
https://www.richters.com/Web_store/web_store.cgi
- Q2 Seedlings only require 2-3 weeks before planting
- Q3 They are generally deer resistant
- Q4 Growth – a one year plant is about 4-5", and a two year mound will be pumpkin size – they bulk up very quickly
- Q5 Pruning – do not prune until October
- Q6 They can be fertilized if they have a growth problem - use lime if necessary around the roots
- Q7 pH level should ideally be 6.5 – the pH should be set when the trench is dug.
- Q8 Lavender is not house plant – but they can be placed in a container. The shelf life is two years. They have to be overwatered, and put in a cooler area like a garage. Remember that the roots go down 4 feet or more and must not be allowed to freeze.
- Q9 A good reference book is Lavender: The Grower's Guide by Virginia Mcnaughton
 Hardcover: 192 pages
 Publisher: Timber Press (May 1 2000)
 ISBN-10: 0881924784

This was a very interesting talk. I learned a lot!