

OPEN

Herbelle

Herbes de Provence

a taste of the French Riviera

by Cindy Matthews

While they were in high school, our children had the wonderful experience of participating in a three month exchange program with French students. Two of the students hailed from the Mediterranean region—Toulon and Nice—and it was during these exchanges that my love affair with Mediterranean cooking began. It is customary for students to exchange gifts and I had the distinct pleasure of being the recipient of a sachet of Herbes de Provence.

Herbes de Provence is a mixture of dried herbs that are traditionally grown in the sunny hills of southern France and Spain; a combination of heat and drought conditions create the strongest flavoured plants. Herbes de Provence combinations vary from region to region, however most consist of differing combinations of dried savoury, fennel, basil, thyme, bay leaf, oregano, marjoram, and of course, lavender.

Tourists arrive in southern France in awe of bucolic fields of purple. Tourism throughout the Mediterranean region has helped to promote lavender as the signature ingredient in Herbes de Provence throughout the world. Lavender is also grown in the USA, British Isles, New Zealand as well as Canada. Farms that cultivate varying species of lavender can be found in Ontario as well as British Columbia.

In Mediterranean regions, lavender grows to approximately 60 to 100 centimetres with blooms showing from May to September. The lavender plant consists of tiny flowers growing on spikes from a woody base of stems surrounded by narrow, silver-grey leaves. Most of us are familiar with the purple blooms but few know that lavender can also be found in white, blue and pink.

Lavender, a member of the mint family, grows best in dry, sunny, rocky environments. I have five plants in my gardens, all planted along south-facing walls. Alkaline soils work best for lavender and its drought-resistant properties make it a terrific addition for those who favour plants that require little to no work. I like to mix in a compost mixture every second spring and pile mulch around the plants' bases in winter. When I observe that green growth has started in spring—early May—I like to prune the dried stems. I repeat this process again in the late summer when I harvest my lavender.

I find that lavender makes a great fly repellent. Stalks are cut and bound with twine and the bouquets hung upside down until the flowers dry. When the flowers are dry, they can be added to sachets to provide a pleasant scent and to repel flies or moths from clothes in drawers, cupboards and closets. To reduce carpet odours, sprinkle dried lavender blossoms on carpets and then vacuum.

Potpourri is a terrific way to use dried lavender or other dried flowers and herbs. Simply layer dried lavender and other dried flowers in a decorative antique glass bowl and set out on a table for the scents to waft through your home.

Remember to periodically add a drop or two of essential oils to reinvigorate the scents.

Lavender has a fresh, floral flavour, with a hint of sweetness cut with citrus. It can be added to foods, fresh or dried. Use a rule of thumb—less is more—when cooking or adding lavender to food or drink. I only use lavender harvested from my own garden because I can guarantee no pesticides are sprayed on my plants. When I add lavender to cooking, I prefer to use dried flower buds and remove stalks after grinding in an herb grinder.

Rose and Lavender Potpourri

Roger Tabor's Wild about Herbs (Readers Digest)

- 🌿 4 ounces dried rose petals/buds
- 🌿 1 to 2 ounces dried lavender flowers
- 🌿 1 ounce dried lavender leaves
- 🌿 1 teaspoon dried lemon thyme leaves
- 🌿 ½ teaspoon orris root powder
- 🌿 ½ teaspoon powdered cloves
- 🌿 5 to 8 drops of rose essential oil
- 🌿 2 drops of lavender essential oil

To make your own Herbes de Provence, use the following dried herbs:

- 🌿 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 🌿 1 tablespoon marjoram
- 🌿 1 tablespoon summer savory
- 🌿 1 tablespoon thyme
- 🌿 1 crushed bay leaf
- 🌿 1 teaspoon lavender

Whenever I make roast turkey, I first smear olive oil over the fresh bird, then sprinkle rosemary, oregano, savoury and a pinch of dried, crushed lavender to the skin before setting into a 325 degree Fahrenheit oven. Similarly, when making the dough for herbed bread, I like to add a pinch of lavender to the other herb ingredients.

Before incorporating lavender in your diet, be sure to check with your health professional.

Pining for the sunny lavender fields of the French Riviera? Try to incorporate lavender in your own gardens, reap the harvest of this versatile and aromatic herb and allow your mind to drift to those idyllic fields far away. ✨

HerbesDeProvenceRecipe: <http://ezinearticles.com/?Easy-to-Grow,-Easy-to-Make—Herbs-De-Provence&id=1569313>



