

Cooking with Lavender

Culinary Lavender is an incredibly versatile herb for cooking. As a member of the same family as many of our most popular herbs, it is not surprising that lavender is edible and that its use in food preparation is also returning. Flowers and leaves can be used fresh, and both buds and stems can be used dried. Culinary Lavender is a member of the mint family and is close to rosemary, sage, and thyme. It is best used with fennel, oregano, rosemary, thyme, sage, and savory.

English Lavender (*L. angustifolia*) and Lavandin (*L. x intermedia*) have the sweetest fragrance of all the lavenders and are the ones most commonly used in cooking. The uses of lavender are limited only by your imagination. Culinary Lavender has a sweet, floral flavor, with lemon and citrus notes. The potency of the lavender flowers increases with drying.

In cooking, use 1/3 the quantity of dried lavender flowers to fresh lavender flowers.

The key to cooking with culinary lavender is to experiment; start out with a small amount of flowers, and add more as you go.

NOTE: Adding too much lavender to your recipe can be like eating perfume and will make your dish bitter. Because of the strong flavor of lavender, the secret is that a little goes a long way.

The lavender flowers add a beautiful color to salads. Lavender can also be substituted for rosemary in many bread recipes. The flowers can be put in sugar and sealed tightly for a couple of weeks then the sugar can be substituted for ordinary sugar for a cake, buns or custards. Grind the lavender in a herb or coffee grinder or mash it with mortar and pestle.

The spikes and leaves of culinary lavender can be used in most dishes in place of rosemary in most recipes. Use the spikes or stems for making fruit or shrimp kabobs. Just place your favorite fruit on the stems and grill.

Flowers look beautiful and taste good too in a glass of champagne, with chocolate cake, or as a garnish for sorbets or ice creams. Lavender lends itself to savory dishes also, from hearty stews to wine-reduced sauces. Diminutive blooms add a mysterious scent to custards, flans or sorbets. Dried lavender blossoms are often used in perfumes and potpourris.

NOTE: Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries, or garden centers. In many cases these flowers have been treated with pesticides not labeled for food crops.