



# PURPLE REIGN

By Julie Catalano  
Photography courtesy of  
Hill Country Lavender

What is it about lavender? Some say it's the captivating fragrance. Others go crazy for the color it adds to homegrown gardens. Many find relief in its legendary healing properties, others keep it as a kitchen staple. Spectacularly versatile and almost universally loved, lavender takes center stage in two annual Texas festivals. In short: Lavender rules.

“**T**he public is much more educated about lavender,” says Tasha Brieger Corradini of Hill Country Lavender in Blanco, the first commercial lavender farm in Texas. “They want a much larger product line. They want more scents mixed with it because lavender is a great mixer; you can put it with a lot of other things. It’s a much different clientele now, instead of just ‘Oooo lavender, what do you do with it?’”

Just about anything you can think of. Corradini carries about 75 different products, most of them made by her and husband Robert. Wash with it, clean with it, cook with it, drink it in tea, even repel insects (reportedly mosquitoes and moths) with it. But the handy herb really shines in the therapeutic arena, as users swear by its benefits for everything from anxiety to headaches, burns, sleep disorders, hair loss, skin and respiratory problems and more. Sprinkle dried buds on salads or desserts, or tie them up in a sachet for a drawer or closet. “Four of our best sellers are body but-

ter, bar soap, spray mist and a little pillow that you throw in your dryer to make your sheets smell yummy,” says Corradini.

With all this talk about lavender, it’s inevitable that “growing your own” becomes a tantalizing prospect. Jane Stephens, treasurer of the Blanco-based Texas Lavender Association (TLA), and owner with husband Mitchell of M & J Lavender Farm in Johnson City, says that whether or not lavender is easy to grow is debatable. “For some people it’s hard, but not for others.” The tendency to overwater does a lot of plants in, she says, and advises a lighter touch once the young plants are “settled in and really growing.” As always, common sense is useful. “If you put it where your sprinkler system hits it all the time, it will die.”

The TLA website ([texaslavenderassociation.org](http://texaslavenderassociation.org)) has a section called “Growing Lavender Successfully in Texas,” with tips on sun (lots of it), soil, fertilizing, disease control, pruning and more. Stephens says that membership is open to all who love lavender and want to learn more about it, with both associate and professional memberships. “It’s

more than just a good smell,” she says. “When you are distilling it yourself like we do you learn about its many healing properties,” adding that she believes that accounts for the heightened interest in lavender. Their membership map on the TLA website shows the highest concentrations of lavender farms in Central Texas and Hill Country, with others scattered in the east, northwest and the Texoma region near the Oklahoma border.

Nichole Bendele, public relations and tasting room coordinator at Becker Vineyards in Stonewall, a popular Hill Country winery and the site of their annual lavender festival, says that lucky for lavender (and Texans), the mostly Spanish variety they grow at the vineyards “likes a hot, dry climate similar to Provence in France. Also “a well-draining sandy loam soil.” Where different types of lavender grow best depends on the climate. In Great Britain, for example, “a damp, cold climate and well-drained soil are conducive to growing the varieties there.” Their well-stocked gift shop features best sellers like lotion (“with our own grapeseeds,” says Bendele), a freshening room spray, and “our very popular lip balm.”

And that brings us to the ultimate question: What kind of crop should we expect this year from our new favorite herb? The short answer is, nobody knows. “It’s part of the mystique,” says Libby Aly, executive director of the Blanco Chamber of Commerce and committee chair of the town’s an-

nual lavender fest. “Some years we’ve had massive blooms, the fields looked great and people could cut their own. Some years we haven’t had bloom one.” It doesn’t seem to have any effect on the festival’s attendance; people still attend to tour nearby farms and revel in all things lavender. Still, Aly is bracing for the inevitable calls from lavender lovers, looking for the answer to the unanswerable — good crop or not? “We often tease that we need to have a ‘LavCam’ at the farms so that people can watch the crops for themselves.”

Corradini, too, says she “has no idea” what spring and summer will bring. Winter weather is key. “We got cold which is really good and we got some rain which is really good, so all indications are looking fairly positive. It’s one of those things where we just hold our breath.” Except to stop and smell the lavender, of course. ♦

## Festival information:

**19th Annual Becker Vineyards Lavender Festival, Stonewall**

Becker Vineyards

May 6-7, 2017

830.644.2681

Free admission (except lavender luncheon)

[beckervineyards.com](http://beckervineyards.com)

**13th Annual Blanco Lavender Festival, Blanco**

Old Blanco County Courthouse Square

June 9-11, 2017

830.833.5101

Free admission (except craft beer tent)

[blancolavenderfest.com](http://blancolavenderfest.com)

