

A close-up photograph of lavender-themed baked goods. In the foreground, several cupcakes with light purple frosting are arranged on a glass tray. Behind them, a stack of rectangular lavender cookies is visible. The background is softly blurred, showing more lavender flowers and greenery. A purple-bordered square frame is centered over the image, containing the title and author's name.

Best-Loved
Lavender
Recipes

Nancy Baggett



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Cooking with Lavender

Culinary lavender is an easy way to add wonderful flavor and fragrance to dishes. But start by understanding that not all lavenders taste good or are suitable for cooking. You need to look for a product labeled *culinary lavender*, or “English” lavender, or *Lavandula angustifolia*, aka “true” lavender. True lavenders, technically known as *angustifolias*, have a chameleon-like spicy, citrusy, piney character that can magically brighten up all sorts of both savory and sweet ingredients.

Ironically, except for one variety called ‘Provence,’ most “French” lavenders, aka *lavandin* or *xintermedia* lavenders, are grown for cosmetics use. They smell great in soaps and such but are too pungent and camphorous for cooking. Varieties labeled “Spanish” or *stoechas* lavenders—which you can identify by their little plumes rising from barrel-shaped bloom heads—are usually bitter tasting and not suitable for cooking either.

Since culinary lavender is a minor product in the French lavender industry, for the freshest, best-quality culinary lavender seek out North American-grown buds or bunches from small, family-run lavender farms. Buy from them online or at farmers’ markets, or for an unforgettable treat, purchase your lavender during a visit to a farm when the fields are in bloom. Ask for their favorite culinary lavender, and if you buy a fresh bunch, hang it upside-down at home to dry and pluck off the blooms to cook with as you need them.

Cooking Tips

Lavender is an unusual herb in that the flowers, commonly called buds, are the edible parts, not the leaves. The buds are actually made up of two parts, little tubes called calyxes and tiny “bloomlets” called corollas on top. The fresh bloomlets are tender and mild and can be plucked off and strewn over cold dishes for a lovely garnish (see p. 39); they fade and drop off as the buds dry. The remaining tube-shaped parts of the buds have most of the plant’s oil sacs, and these contribute much of the prized flavor and aroma. The buds are more potent and concentrated once dried, so be a little more generous if cooking with fresh buds.

- ✿ Avoid lengthy boiling of lavender or long exposure to high heat; this turns its flavor harsh.
- ✿ Lavender is a potent, assertive herb, so if you’re a newbie use a light hand. (Some recipes suggest a quantity range, such as 1 to 1 1/2 teaspoons to guide you.)
- ✿ Never cook with lavender essential oil, even culinary lavender oil; it is too potent to consume, plus the distillation process often makes it taste unpleasant.
- ✿ Try subbing culinary lavender in recipes calling for rosemary or thyme, or use it along with them. It has a somewhat similar scent and pungency, yet is a nice change of pace.
- ✿ Many recipes call for steeping lavender buds in water, then straining them out, or grinding them with sugar and sifting out any remaining bits. So have on hand a very fine mesh sieve, or better yet, small and large ones.
- ✿ Like most herbs, lavender gets stale with long storage. If your supply smells musty-dusty, it’s time to restock.
- ✿ Culinary lavenders can be white, pale pink, blue to deep purple, and *all can be equally tasty*. Just be sure you’re cooking with *culinary* lavender buds.





Easy Lavender Pink Lemonade

This lovely—and very popular—lavender thirst-quencher starts with a quart of ready-to-serve pink lemonade from the supermarket dairy case. It's jazzed up not only with lavender but with some fresh lemon juice and slices. If you use regular lemonade, the lavender will give it a slight pinkish tinge, but not the vivid color shown in the photo here.

TIP: Lemon slices help boost the cheerful look and fresh, citrusy taste of purchased lemonade, but remove them from the serving pitcher after a half hour or so. While the yellow zest parts lend welcome flavor, the white pith will gradually turn the lemonade bitter.



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| 1 | quart ready-to-use dairy case pink lemonade, well chilled | 2 | medium-sized well-washed lemons |
| 1 | tablespoon dried culinary lavender buds | 2 | to 3 cups ice, plus more for serving |
| | | | Fresh or dried, lavender sprigs for garnish, optional |

Stir together 1/4 cup of the lemonade and the lavender buds in a 2-cup microwave-safe glass measure. Microwave on full power for 45 seconds. Stop and stir, then microwave on 50 percent power 1 minute longer. To avoid any chance of a boil-over, let stand to steep and cool in the microwave oven for 5 to 10 minutes. (Steep longer for more pronounced lavender flavor.)

Meanwhile, put the rest of the lemonade in a large serving pitcher. Cut the lemons into slices, discarding seeds. Strain the steeped lavender lemonade liquid through a fine mesh sieve into the pitcher, pressing down firmly to force through as much liquid as possible. Add 5 or 6 lemon slices and stir well. Then add ice to the pitcher. Pour the lemonade over ice-filled glasses, garnishing the servings with fresh lemon slices and lavender sprigs, as desired.