RAISING LAVENDER

BY MARIAN V. DORSEY

WHEN unfortunate investments dispossessed us of our city property and our health at "one fell swoop," then it was that the love of the land born in our bones, though until now latent in this generation, clamored to express itself in reinstating activities, and it is needless to say that we thanked Heaven that the homestead was still ours, in an Eastern shore county of Maryland.

The time had now come when life demanded something more of us than the mere summer enjoyment of our ancestral acres. It demanded that we wrest our living from the corn and wheat fields; but as a pin-money project the idea occurred to me of raising lavender, for sale in the large cities where there is always a contingent of the elect who appreciate the finer things and are willing to pay a fair price for them.

Accordingly, after we were well settled in the old home, I set about carrying out my plan.

In the spring—it may be done from the first of March to the middle of May—I filled a box, twenty-five inches square and ten inches high, with good rich garden earth, adding no fertilizer of any kind, and placed it in a sunny window of an up-stairs room that had no fire in it.

In this earth I placed my finger and ran it from end to end of the box, making long shallow drills, into which the seed were shaken rather thickly, and then lightly covered by taking a handful of earth at a time and evenly sifting it between the fingers until the seed were no longer visible; after which I sprinkled them and left them to germinate.

When the top moisture had dried off, the sprinkling was renewed every few days, never allowing the earth to get dry and hard. In three weeks the seed came up, and three weeks later—six weeks from sowing—the plants, having four leaves, were ready for transplanting to the garden, where a bed from three to four feet square had been spaded-up and pulverized, ready for them.

I was warned against putting stable fertilizer in this transplanting bed, as being too heating, and none was put in.

The rows were made eight inches apart, and the plants set five inches from one another in the row. This is enough space to allow for the first season, as they grow very slowly. The second spring, a neighbor sent me eleven cuttings from a large bush of true English lavender, and of these I rooted seven successfully. It was then that I learned the difference between the *vera* and the *spica*, as to both bloom and length of life.

When I sent to a horticulturist for lavender seed, those sent me were *Lavendula spica*—having longer stems and shorter life than the *Lavendula vera*, or true English lavender, which, if once successfully started, persists for many years if properly transplanted every two years, dividing the roots and setting them deep in the earth each time.

After the young growth has put out on the true English lavender-bushes—well-started ones—you may break off the tender shoots, and root them, just as you do geranium cuttings, in wet sand, and then plant them. These will produce fine bushes, in bearing, by the third year.

Also, that second spring, I had four long rows ploughed and raked, in the garden, putting them in the best condition for setting out the year-old seedlings, which were then about three inches high.

Three feet were allowed between the plants, and the rows were also three feet apart, so that a horse and small cultivator could pass both ways.

In a neighboring garden there were very large lavender-bushes that had been growing there over ten years, but the last of my fine ones, raised from cuttings, became extinct after five summers of blooming, do what I could to save them; and even the *Lavendula spica*, which is better adapted to our soil, has rarely survived the fifth year; so I found that I must sow seed every season in order to keep up a supply.

The seedsman advised sowing the seed in the fall, in cool, moist earth, and transplanting in the spring—a method which, after repeated trials, I abandoned altogether, as they did not come up well for me when sown in the autumn, though I have had them come up satisfactorily and make fine, sturdy plants when sown out in the open ground in the spring.

I kept up the box method in addition, however, in order to be sure of coaxing up plants and saving them from possible outside accidents. Both those germinated indoors and outdoors must be planted deeply: that is, the long, fibrous root must have a deep hole dug to receive it and earth pressed around the plant, clear up to the leaves.

Some of the beautiful gardens of England have division hedges of lavender, and one cannot imagine a more delightful place to ramble—for a lavender-bush will smell of lavender as long as there is a leaf or stick of it alive.

I myself keep even the dry stems from which the blossoms have been scattered, to place a handful at a time on the open fire in the great old fireplace of our living-room, where its curling smoke wafts forth a faint aromatic reminder of its summer fragrance.

As lavender was only to be a by-product of farming, I aimed to restrict my bushes to a number that I could personally care for, assisted only occasionally by a boy who ploughed the rows in the spring. My aim being to have a hundred bushes, I planted out over a hundred and fifty plants so as to allow for losses; having been told—and it is true—that lavender, like so many other desirable things, is not too easily obtained.

One who had been the mistress of a beautiful old garden for fifty years advised planting it on high, sunny, well-drained ground, as it will surely die out quickly if moisture settles around the roots.

The third year, when the lavender came into its first blooming, I had a hundred and twenty-five bushes, including the seven splendid bushes of the English lavender I had rooted.

Every other year, in the spring, about the last week of March or soon after, I changed the position of the bushes in the rows, planting them two feet from the spot they were growing in, which still kept them in rows.

The sprigs were allowed to remain on the bushes until they had flowered clear out to the ends, but not to stay till they had dried up on the stems—a mistake some people make.

When in full bloom they were cut with large shears and laid or spread on open newspapers, to save all the shed blooms. It was then dried on old sheets.

The sprigs were cut near the bottom of the bushes, making them about twenty-five inches long, and all the bloom ends placed in one direction so as to save trouble when arranging the bunches. Sometimes, when the bulk was quite large, it was laid on a sheet in the sun—out-of-doors—with papers spread over the blossom ends to prevent drying them too much before the stems cured. A couple of hours in the summer sun is ample time.

When entirely dry I made up my bunches for shipment. The bunches were five or six inches round—a fairly good handful—held together by winding a yard of very narrow lavender ribbon around them and tying the ends in a bow. To this ribbon, before rolling the bunch of lavender in half a sheet of white tissue-paper, I attached a little tag on which I wrote: "Light a sprig of lavender at the blossom end, invert, extinguish, and allow to smoulder. Will fill the sick-room—or any other—with the elusive sweetness of an old garden. An English use of it."

As every one knew the ordinary use of lavender—putting it with the bed linen—I wished to disseminate this bit of æstheticism imparted by an English friend.

The ends of the tissue-paper wrappings were folded down and pinned to keep in the fragrance and the loose blossoms; for the shed blooms make delightful sachets when sewed up in little squares of organdie and bring dreams of "Araby the Blest," if slipped under one's pillow.

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