

FIELD
TESTED



MONTANA LAVENDER

Field Tested is a series of reports about farm tools that have been tested by Montana farmers to enhance their specialty crop production. The reports describe these farmers' findings to help others make informed decisions about their specialty crop businesses. Visit FarmLinkMontana.org to read more Field Tested reports. This project is administered by the Community Food & Agriculture Coalition with funding from the Montana Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

JASPER'S GARDEN | MISSOULA



Stacy Hunt

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jaspersgarden.com

JASPER'S GARDEN SNAPSHOT

Location: Missoula, MT

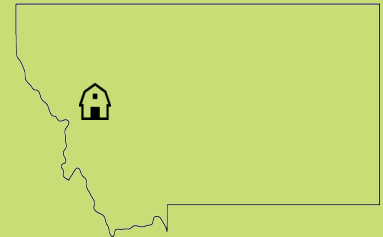
Acres in Production:

<1 acre

Operator(s): Stacy Hunt

Crops:

French lavender and peonies



INTRODUCTION

Jasper's Garden began as a memorial garden for Stacy Hunt's son, Jasper. She started her lavender operation in addition to her full-time job; after several years of production Stacy found the demand for dried lavender in Missoula was larger than her garden would be able to produce. She set out to increase her lavender production by investing in new lavender plants and materials to expand the production area, and installing a more efficient drip irrigation system on a timer. She hopes her experience will give others some key information to enter the dried floral market in Montana.



Lavender drying in Stacy's garage. Her next expansion will include a separate drying area.

THE FLORAL CROP MARKET

Some unique specialty crops, such as lavender, are deer resistant and relatively water resilient so they can provide a good source of low-maintenance farm income. Additionally, such crops are not widely grown for sale in Montana, providing an open market opportunity.

Stacy currently produces 200 bunches of lavender a year from Jasper's Garden. She dries the lavender and sells it bunched or as "shake," which is sold in sachets, from August to December. Her primary market is the Good Food Store, a natural foods store in Missoula. Demand for her lavender is so high at the Good Food Store that it often sells out quickly. Stacy plans to supply the grocery store with more lavender for more months throughout the year through her expanded garden area.

MATERIALS PURCHASED

- New lavender plants
- Growing area expansion materials: weed matting, gravel, topsoil, brush removal, bed preparation
- Irrigation system
- **TOTAL: ~\$5,000**

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LAVENDER PRODUCTION

Lavender Varieties

The French lavender variety "Grosso" is the most well-known and made up the majority of Stacy's lavender plants. For her expanded production area, she tried some new varieties:

"Phenomenal" is known for its heat tolerance and cold hardiness, good attributes for Western Montana's climate.

"Hidcote" is an English lavender with lighter blue-gray foliage. Both lavenders are lighter in color than "Grosso." For now, it's too early to tell if Stacy recommends these varieties for growers.

Weed Control

Lavender does not produce well if it has a lot of weed competition. Once the land was prepared for new plantings, Stacy added weed matting around the plantings to decrease this weed competition. The weed mat has the added benefit of reducing the amount of time spent weeding. This is an important factor for Stacy because her lavender operation is in addition to her full-time job.



A new "Phenomenal" lavender plant at Jasper's Garden next to its drip irrigation line.

TIP

Stacy's sales displays contain only one variety of lavender at a time. Sales of the lighter-colored lavender are poor when they are next to the darker variety.

Bed Preparation and Planting

Before laying weed matting, Stacy had to clear brush from the expansion area, including any roots, because decaying organic matter may be too nutrient rich for the new lavender to establish successfully.

Lavender prefers hot, well-drained soil. In her original garden she used gravel beds to increase the heat of the ground around the plants. When her farm experienced an early freeze, the plants that had thick layers of gravel around them survived.

Since Stacy found success with her gravel beds, she decided to continue using them in her expanded production area, laying a thick layer of gravel over the weed matting.

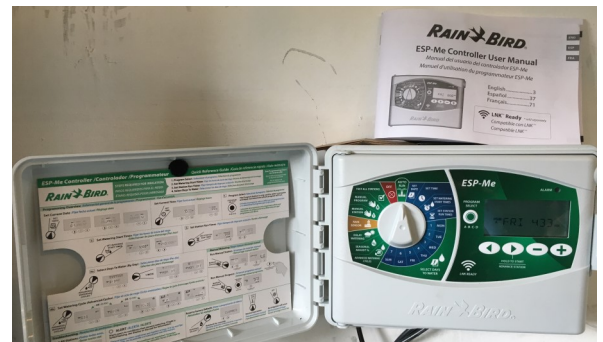
With the production area prepped, she planted her new plants on the 1st of June to avoid any risk of frost damaging the new plants.



New lavender plantings are on the left and in the foreground, with mature plants on the right in the background.

Timed Drip Irrigation System

Overhead irrigation can cause lavender leaves and flowers to get wet, which can cause shattering or diseases to take hold. Shattering is when the flower heads of the lavender break, allowing petals or flowers to drop off the stems during harvest or drying. To avoid this, Stacy installed a drip irrigation system that is on a timer for precise watering. She is using the Rain Bird irrigation timer and has been happy with its reliability and ability to be programmed easily.



The Rain Bird irrigation system controller

Results

The garden's new automatic watering system has been essential to ensuring healthy, vigorous plants and the Rainbird Irrigation timer has streamlined management of the garden. Between the new plantings and efficient watering, Stacy's lavender harvest increased by 65%, or 130 additional lavender bunches, which all sold at the Good Food Store. She expects to harvest even more when the plants are fully mature in 2019.

Additionally, Stacy provided proof of income for her lavender crop to demonstrate to the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency that lavender is a viable crop in Montana. As a result, lavender is now included on the list of insurable crops in Montana and she has protected the investments in her lavender garden. Stacy encourages lavender growers to insure their crop now that the option is available.

KEY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWING LAVENDER IN MONTANA

Challenge	Potential problem	Minimizing Impact
Early frost in Fall	Plant roots freeze before dormancy in the fall and can die	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant after last frost date but before it gets hot Plant older plants that are heartier Use gravel mulch to increase soil temperature
No overhead irrigation	Wet foliage leads to disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in drip irrigation
Weed competition	Weeds compete for water, nutrients, and light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place weed matting under gravel to keep weeds from growing through rocks
Marginal climate for lavender	Dry, cold environment doesn't favor lavender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant varieties that can survive Montana's extremes: Hidcote and Phenomenal are recommended; Grosso also survived for Stacy

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Montana Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program: The purpose of this program is solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Montana. Visit their website to find funding opportunities and more information. Search [Montana SCBG](#).

Farm Link Montana: A project of the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition to connect Montana's beginning farmers and ranchers with the tools they need to succeed: farmlinkmontana.org

Field Tested Reports and Videos: Find more reports about other projects and see videos of tools in action at the [Field Tested webpage, under Resources on FarmLinkMontana.org](#)