

# ZEST

HOME & GARDEN. ARTS. FOOD. PASSIONS.

MAINE



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When your crop is lavender,  
as it is at Glendarragh Farm,  
everything makes scents



# *Purple* Passion

words *Karen Watterson*  
photography *Lorie Costigan*



Photo: Lynn Karlin

Here on an 1820 farmstead in Appleton that once housed livestock, the air is much sweeter now. Where cows and poultry used to graze, fragrant lavender grows in neat rows.

The shrubs on Glendarragh Farm awaken each spring, when Lorie Costigan and her family roll back the agricultural cover that keeps the plants safe from winter. “The plants look gray, but if the stems are pliable, they haven’t died,” she says. “They need time to rest. Then they’ll slowly start to green up.”

Like Mainers at the end of a long winter, the plants react happily to the lengthening days and increased sunlight, going from hibernation to full-on bloom. By the Fourth of July, the 27-acre farm turns various shades of purple and a sweet perfume scents the air.

Over the past 12 years, Costigan and her family have expanded the farm to more than 6,000 lavender plants, with over a dozen varieties. “When we bought the place in 2007,” she says, “there wasn’t a single perennial garden on the property, not one.”

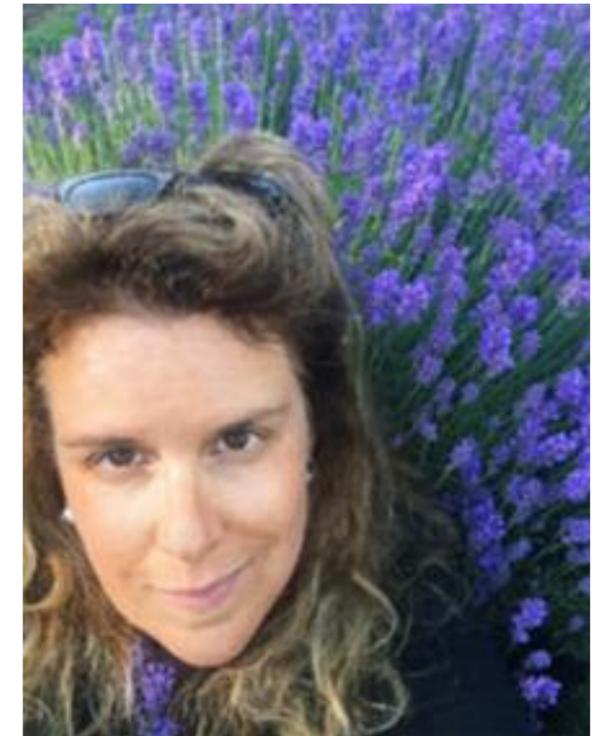
A former journalist, Costigan is now a full-time lavender farmer, aided by her husband, Patrick, their sons and Liam, a 120-pound German shepherd. Everyone gets their hands in the soil and on the plants, with additional help from hired hands when it’s time for harvest. Together they’ve transformed the property into an inviting Midcoast destination, drawing garden lovers from near and far.

Every year, the Costigans make improvements to the farm. A 90-foot greenhouse was added, allowing for year-round experimentation. The barn, circa 1790, was restored five years ago and is now used for drying. The plants are hung from the rafters, after being hand-harvested with sickles. “Even when lavender is cut, it’s visually appealing to people,” says Costigan.

In 2018, she bought a copper alembic still, enabling her to produce lavender oil for the first time. “It’s a centuries-old distillation process for essential oils,” she explains. “You fill it with flowers and stems, then heat it up. I thought it would be easy, but it took a long week of persistence and maybe a little hubris,” Costigan says with a laugh. When water in the still is heated, it creates steam, which is then transferred to the flowers. With some patience, essential lavender oil, the purest distillate, is produced, as well as lavender water.

Both are used by Costigan in her array of lavender products sold online and in her small shop in Camden. This lavender, according to Costigan, is nothing like the dusty scent that clings to your grandmother’s handkerchief. “That’s likely to be synthetic,” she says. “People think they know what lavender smells like, but it’s uncommonly experienced in its true form.”

Lorie Costigan, owner of Glendarragh Lavender Farm.





Cyrus Hannibal and Rachel Arday, who help with the mid-July harvest.

She has developed a line of balms, lotions, soaps and bath soaks using all natural and organic ingredients. “We use the Dutch hybrids for these because they have the strongest scent,” says Costigan. Items for the home include sachets and room freshener spray, candles and laundry detergent. All the sifting and stuffing of the sachets is done on the farm. “Because I was in the store talking to customers, I could find out what people wanted. That has been the biggest learning moment,” she says. “It was important to understand how people relate to what we’re making.”

Some lavender, mostly English varieties including Hidcote, Betty’s Blue and Jean Davis, are used for culinary purposes and Costigan has become the go-to for local restaurants, bakeries and chocolate makers. Dot’s Market in nearby Lincolnville makes delightful lavender shortbread cookies as well as scones.

“The culinary varieties of lavender produce less camphor, making them less bitter to the palate,” Costigan explains. “We

do the first sifting by hand, then use an automated seed sifter to further clean the bud and separate dust and chaff. It makes it much cleaner and easier to use for clients like Black Dinah Chocolatiers.” Culinary lavender is sold on the website, encouraging any and all to experiment with it in sweet or savory dishes.

It seems Costigan was destined for this life. Her passion for perennials and fragrant crops goes back to early childhood, when she was the only kid around watching PBS’s “The Victory Garden.” Previous experience in media and marketing has been applicable to running the business. And the farm is the embodiment of the natural lifestyle—and legacy—she and her husband sought for their family.

“This is our home,” she says. “Lavender is a wonderful crop and there’s plenty of room to grow more. The interest in lavender never ceases to amaze me.” Glendarragh is open to visitors six days a week through most of the summer.

“People’s desire to see it up close is very strong,” says Costigan. “People visit from a city environment, look around and ask, ‘How did this all happen?’ It’s a lot of physical labor, but we’re doing something we love.”

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

**FAVORITE ...**

**Drink?** Gin and tonic with a sprig of lavender goes up against Herbal Revolution’s White Pine Shrub for a good mocktail.

**Maine restaurant?** In Good Company is great in every season. We can count on excellent food and an atmosphere that’s conducive to good conversation.

**Place you’ve traveled to as an adult?** Nice, France, and surrounding towns. As a city it’s pedestrian friendly and the outdoor markets and gardens make a sun-seeking gardener happy in spring!

**Shoes?** Viscata Spanish espadrilles. Hands down.

**Way to relax?** I relax with family time, yoga, singing, reading (fiction and non; I devour both) and designing new gardens before the REM sleep comes.

Photo: Lynn Karlin

