

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2006



A two-acre lavender field is open to the public for the first-ever Ohio Lavender Festival at DayBreak Lavender Farm in Streetsboro. Cooking demonstrations, nature walks and crafts activities are some of the events planned for the celebration, which runs through Sunday. (Photos courtesy of Mary Averill of Averill & Associates Creative Lab and DayBreak Lavender Farm.)

WEEKEND FOCUS



At DayBreak Lavender Farm in Streetsboro, owners Jody Byrne and Michael Slyker use what they grow in creations including lavender soap (shown), aromatherapy oils and body splashes.

Life-enhancing lavender Streetsboro festival celebrates nature's multitasking herb

Away from Cleveland's mass of concrete and smells of industrial burning lies an aromatic sanctuary at DayBreak Lavender Farm.

There, herbal flowers on endless rows of lavender bushes blanket the emerald grasses in a violet haze. The purple sea fills the air with the fragrance of sweet camphor, which Jody Byrne and Michael Slyker hope draw visitors to their farm in Streetsboro for the first Ohio Lavender Festival.

Byrne and Slyker, two self-proclaimed aging hippies, hope to encourage the love of lavender by promoting its vast practical uses.

PREVIEW:

Lavender festival

What: Weekend celebration of lavender featuring nature walks, harvesting, live entertainment, meditation, crafts and cooking demonstrations.

When: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. today, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.

Where: DayBreak Lavender Farm, 2129 Frost Road, Streetsboro. Free parking at nearby Wal-Mart, 9440 Ohio 14.

Cost: \$5 single daily pass; \$15 family pass for two parents and up to four children under 13, \$5 each additional child.

Call: 330-626-3235.

Web: www.ohiolavenderfestival.com

Lavender comes from the Latin word *lavare* meaning "to wash." Its use has been noted in history as far back as ancient Greece. Roman emperor Nero was known for using lavender to clean and treat battle wounds. He also strewed the plant in the streets after combat to replace the spoiled stench of war with the scent of sweet lavender.

Besides aromatic, the

herb is known to be antitoxic, anti-viral, anti-spasmodic... the list goes on. In naming its extensive attributes, Byrne makes the plant sound more bionic than botanic.

"I call it the Swiss Army Knife of herbs," Byrne says. "It's the only herb that can be used in healing, decor, culinary, crafts and aromatherapy."

In addition to nature walks and bouquet-harvesting, festival activities will include cooking demonstrations; craft activities; soap-, perfume- and dye-making; and lessons in aromatherapy.

"Lavender is as much a culture as it is a plant," Byrne says. "People who love it usually have a memory attached to it."

Byrne's love for the herb came from inspiration years ago while she was living in New York. She grew the plant in a small window box that faced the East River. Its spot was cold and got little sunlight. But somehow the plant thrived.

"I became emotionally attached to this plucky plant," she says. She brought her love with her when she moved to Ohio, creating a two-acre lavender field at DayBreak. Although DayBreak is the only lavender farm in the area, Byrne hopes to inspire other farmers to create similar fields.

"I would welcome other farmers to participate in the festival and have it truly be an Ohio festival," she says.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: mnguyen@plaind.com, 216-999-4876