



The box-hedge knot garden at the nursery is planted with lavenders.



From left: white-flowered *Lavandula stoechas* 'Snowman' flowers from late spring to late summer; *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, or liquorice, is a member of the pea and bean family; the dainty pink flowers of soapwort are sweetly scented.

large tender species from the Canary Islands. It has soft, ferny foliage and beautiful blue flowers, growing to 30in (75cm) tall.

Another wild species, *Lavandula viridis*, has unusual greenish bracts instead of colourful flowers. Growing to 24in (60cm) high, it has an intriguing lemon scent. The nursery is also the only place in the country outside the National Collection of Lavender in Norfolk to grow *L. aristibracteata*, a rare species from Somalia. This is a low-growing, tender plant with vivid blue flowers and divided green leaves, just 12in (30cm) tall.

Rare varieties

Other unusual herbs include liquorice, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*. Rarely found in gardens or nurseries, this hardy perennial is known for its stomach-soothing properties. The roots produce the

traditional flavour, and can be chewed raw, directly after being lifted and washed. If left to dry out, they can be used to flavour teas or syrups. It is a slow growing plant, but will eventually reach 48in (122cm), so is best placed at the back of a border.

Soapwort, *Saponaria officinalis*, is another herbal oddity. This can be used as a gentle soap for washing hair or delicate cloth. "Soapwort is often used for cleaning old tapestries because it is so gentle," says Christine. The leaves are simply steeped with distilled water, which is then strained through a cheesecloth. A pretty, mound-forming herb, growing to a height and spread of approximately 20in (50cm), it has clusters of campion-like pink or white flowers.

One of the more unusual edible herbs at the nursery is the Egyptian 'walking' onion. This produces bulbils, or small bulbs, >