

SALVIAS FOR EVERY GARDEN

by Ellen Zagory, Director of Horticulture

We are excited about the 2003 Plant Faire

because we are hosting the sale at a new and improved location, the Arboretum Nursery at Orchard Park. We have expanded our selection, and are trying out new systems for streamlining the sales. Also new this year are special member benefits at the Plant Faire: members may shop early, from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m., before the sale is open to the public, and members will receive a 10% discount on all purchases.

This year we are featuring a special plant group—the sages, or members of the genus *Salvia*. This diverse group offers a multitude of choices to the Valley gardener interested in color, wildlife value, drought tolerance, fall display and ornamental foliage.

In nature this group is distributed in temperate and subtropical regions from sea level to 11,000 feet. Some are purely herbaceous, either annual or perennial, some make good groundcovers and others are upright shrubs. While lavender or purple “shish-ka-bob” shaped flower heads are common on

shrubby California natives, flowers on other sages broaden the gardener’s palette and come in blue, white, pink, yellow, red and even brown.

SHRUBBY NATIVES

The California flora provides us with some excellent drought-tolerant landscape plants for hot, exposed sites. *Salvia clevelandii* is a shrubby perennial that forms a woody

base and has a number of selections. ‘Allen Chickering’ and ‘Pozo Blue’ are two excellent forms that have proven their disease resistance and garden tolerance in our area. For larger gardens we are happy to have a supply of the lower growing (and vigorous) hybrid *S. ‘Bee’s Bliss’*, an introduction from Cornflower Farms, and an excellent heat tolerant, silver-foliaged ground cover. Somewhat taller but with equally beautiful white foliage is the mounding *S. leucophylla* ‘Point Sal Spreader’ with its amazing tolerance of summer drought and pale lavender–pink flowers. For banks and hillside in need of erosion control we recommend *Salvia mellifera*, one of the toughest, low, shrubby natives available—and the flowers smell like grape Kool-Aid!

A RAINBOW FROM MEXICO

One of the most popular groups of sages that we sell are the selections and hybrids of *Salvia greggii* and *Salvia microphylla*. Hybrids of these plants have been renamed *Salvia x jamensis* for the village of Jame in Coahuila province, Mexico.

There are many forms in cultivation of which we offer a number of colors. *S. greggii* ‘Furman’s Red’ and ‘Lipstick’ have deep red

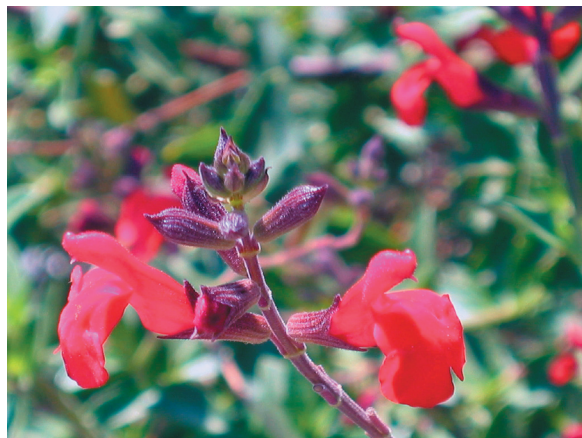


Salvia spathaceae. Photo by Ernesto Sandoval

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and deep fuchsia colored flowers respectively. We have a good supply of *S. x jamensis* 'Salmon' (named for the flower color) and *S. x jamensis* 'Sierra San Antonio,' a tough plant tolerant of dry conditions with attractive bicolor flowers of creamy yellow and peachy-rose. We also have unnamed forms of pink and yellow available. All of these are upright forms with small elliptical smooth leaves and multitudes of flowers first in early summer and then



Autumn sage, *Salvia greggii* 'Scott's Red'

again in autumn, earning the name "autumn sage" and providing a much welcome show of fall blooms.

Salvia microphylla is a larger and broader shrub than *Salvia greggii* although the flowers are very similar. With broader, egg shaped leaves with evident vein patterns and toothed margins, these make three- to four-foot tall and wide plants that spread to make broad patches. The varieties we are offering this year in addition to the beautiful red-flowered species are 'San Carlos Festival' from Tamaulipas with magenta-scarlet flowers and 'Wild Thing,' a plant obtained from Bob Hamm of Sacramento, with fuchsia-pink flowers which profusely cover the plant.

Also from Mexico is *Salvia chamaedryoides*, a shrubby plant with attractive evergreen gray foliage and blue flowers which deserve adjectives such as "sparkling" and "radiant". *Salvia coahuilensis* is another low-growing evergreen shrub which liberally produces beet-purple flowers.

HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

Some of the bluest blue flowers are produced by species of *Salvia*. Also coming to California horticulture via Mexico is *Salvia patens*, a true perennial which dies back to its tuberous root in winter. We have 'Guanajuato' a beautiful variant with deep blue flowers more than two inches in length on plants that grow to six feet. Another new selection grown from Jelitto Seed is 'Blue Angel,' a vigorous grower with showy bloom. These plants need good garden soil and deep weekly irrigation.

From the Mediterranean have come the long-blooming and hardy perennial sages like 'Blaukonigin' (blue queen) which are classically used in perennial borders. This year we are trying a new form, 'Rosenwein' (rose wine), with an "earthy pink" color. A very similar and rarely available form which is thought to be a hybrid relation is *Salvia* 'Rose Queen' with lovely rosy-pink spikes.

ROBUST REDS AND BLUE GIANTS

Other species of *salvia* are large shrubs in their native range and though perhaps tender (15 to 20 degrees F) if exposed can be grown successfully in protected locations. Hummingbird enthusiasts will approve of two of our showiest red-flowered species, *Salvia darcyi* and *Salvia regla*. *S. darcyi* is a large perennial to three feet tall and will die to its rootstock in winter. In spring, it grows to rapidly produce light green deltoid leaves and large, showy, orange-red flowers. A show stopper, it likes full sun and weekly watering. Similar in color and truly a deciduous shrub, *Salvia regla* will reach up to six feet tall with long signal-red flowers which droop

gracefully from the stem ends. Both of these species respond to judicious and frequent pruning to shape them and force branching.

Two large, blue-flowered sages are similar in size and both evergreen in warm winters. *Salvia guaranitica* 'Argentina skies' is a pale blue selection of a robust plant with anise-scented foliage which flowers heavily in the hot summer months. *Salvia mexicana* 'Limelight' has purple-blue flowers framed with lime green bracts that add sparkle and provide nectar for insects and hummingbirds.

But what about all the other salvias we don't have time for here? Every garden needs a culinary sage for flavoring roast fowl, pineapple sage with brilliant blooms and deliciously scented leaves, 'Indigo Spires' an annual that acts like a perennial with purple blue spires all year, lyre-leaf sage, dolomite sage, clary sage. Whew! You can see the choices are many and the variety amazing. Be sure to check the catalog for the varieties we didn't have space to write about. For the dedicated sage-o-phile we highly recommend *The New Book of Salvias* by Betsy Clebsch, which can give you more specific details on the sages you select to grow.



Salvia clevelandii, San Diego sage