Flowering varieties of Salvia, also known as sage, are a gardener’s favorite as they provide a wide range of color and form. With colors from scarlet red to blue to white, in both annual and perennial plants of native and non-native origins, Salvia offers a plant suitable for all gardens. In particular, let’s take a look at the commonly available varieties including Red Salvia, Scarlet Salvia, Mexican Salvia, Sapphire Salvia, and Blue Salvia.

The only annual Salvia that most gardeners cultivate is the Red Salvia. This flowering annual produces spikes of red, purple, pink, salmon, white or bi-colored blossoms. In most garden centers, these are as common as marigolds with red being the predominant color available. Growing up to 18 inches tall and up to a foot wide, this Salvia will produce a good flower show for several weeks. Then, to produce another flush of growth and subsequent flowers, cut off the old flowers. If this task is not completed, flowering will stop. Grow this Salvia in full sun and set transplants eight to twelve inches apart to create a mass of color. There are at least 20 varieties to pick from ranging from flower color to plant size.

Another favorite Salvia in our area is the Scarlet Salvia. This is a perennial plant that is a native to Florida. It is a tall plant up to four feet in height with rich red flowers produced from spring through fall. Sometimes used in mass as a tall groundcover, the Scarlet Salvia does best in full sun, but will grow in shade, but with fewer flowers. This Salvia is very drought tolerant and actually thrives in our Florida summer heat. At the end of the growing season when flowering ceases, cut it back for a neater appearance. One cultivar to look for is 'Lady in Red' with deep red flowers.

Mexican Salvia is another fairly common flowering Salvia available in our area. Another perennial, the Mexican Salvia has gray-green foliage with a somewhat wooly, hairy appearance that is soft to the touch. The multiple flowers are rose-purple and white in color and arranged in whorls. As with many types of Salvia, hummingbirds are very attracted to the flowers. Somewhat drought tolerant, the Mexican Salvia can be used in mass planting and looks good as a container specimen as
One of the largest flowers produced by Salvia is found on the Sapphire Salvia. The dark-blue flower spikes appear through the summer and fall months above the two-foot tall foliage. Wide-spreading, the Sapphire Salvia can grow two to three feet wide and accordingly, space individual plants 15 inches apart. This perennial Salvia can be used as a groundcover when installed in mass plantings. Best planted in well-drained soils, this Salvia is drought tolerant.

One last species of Salvia to mention is Salvia farinacea or Blue Salvia. This Salvia is a native of the southwest United States. The grey-green foliage supports flower spikes of bluish-purple on this two to three-foot tall plant. A couple of blue-purple cultivars available include 'Rhea' and 'Victoria Blue'. There is also a white variety called 'Argent White'. Planted in front of the green foliage of a shrub hedge, this Salvia makes a real nice display. Keep in mind however, that Blue Salvia may finish flowering in mid-summer in our area of Florida.

Salvias of all types are readily available at most garden centers in our area. Try different cultivars to discover your favorite!

Resource: