

SATISFYING SALVIA WORKS GREAT IN ANY GARDEN

By Ralph E. Mitchell, Director/Horticulture Agent - UF/IFAS Extension Service, Charlotte County

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 woolly, 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

well. Consider using the cut flowers in arrangements as they last for several days in good condition.

One of the largest flowers produced by Salvias 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:

Gilman, E.F. & Howe, T. (1999) Salvia splendens. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

For more information on all types of annual and perennial flowers, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.