

March 23, 2016



Salvia

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Have you been ever been entranced by the tall graceful blooms in other people's gardens, and would you like to have some of the magic in your garden? Then growing salvia (sometimes referred to as sage) is something you should try. These beauties are members of the mint family. They are fast-growing, easy to grow, come back every year, and provide wide swaths of beautiful flowers for your enjoyment year after year. Growing this wonderful perennial (some are annual) will provide a wide range of smells and sights, because there are so many different varieties. They can be grown from seed or cuttings or purchased in containers from most local nurseries. Floral salvia is not to be confused with culinary sage.

The blooms of these wonderful perennials are long-lasting, and attract butterflies and other pollinators to the garden. Every garden will benefit from these tall, spiky blooms. They are rapid growers and reward the gardener with rich color throughout the summer and into the fall. Their colors range from pinks, reds, purples and blues, even to yellow and white. Make certain you know about how large the particular varieties you choose will grow. For instance, *Salvia microphylla* (Hot Lips) will grow into a rather large shrub which will need a sizeable space in which to expand, up to six feet tall and four feet wide. Its flowers are red and white. *Salvia pachyphylla* (rose sage), native to California, is rarely grown in gardens, though it deserves to be. It's heat and drought tolerant, with clusters of lavender-purple flowers over evergreen silvery foliage, averaging three feet tall and three feet wide.

Salvia has quite a colorful history! One variety, *Salvia divinorum* is endemic to the Sierra Madre Mountains in Oaxaca, Mexico, and has been used by shamans to discover the cause of a person's illness. It is also used by the Mazatec Indians of this area for meditation, prediction, and the search for the divine. Some suggest that it was introduced after the conquest of the new world.

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Because of its beauty and diversity, it is grown in gardens throughout the U.S. and many other countries.

For an olfactory treat, try *Salvia elegans* (pineapple), *Salvia dorisiana* (fruit), or *Salvia officinalis* (common spice sage). Chia plant seeds come from *Salvia hispanica*. If you are planning on planting some, wait until the danger of frost is over, then plant them in a sunny or partly shady location. One type of salvia, *Salvia koyamae* (Japanese yellow sage) likes only shade and rich moist soil. It is best to ask the nursery or do your own research for the ideal location for your particular plants. *Salvia greggii* is a popular plant, and there are several types, one of the most popular being Autumn sage. This plant with red flowers and aromatic foliage is a soft, mounding shrub about two to three feet tall. For a velvety touch, try *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican bush sage); my granddaughter calls the flowers fairy slippers because they are soft and velvety to the touch. It can also take up a lot of space, usually about three to four feet tall and up to six feet wide! Other popular types of salvia for our area include *Lepechinia fragrans* (Island pitcher sage), *Salvia mexicana* (Mexican sage), *Perovskia atriplicifolia* (Russian Sage), and *Salvia guaranitica* ('Black and Blue' salvia) which produces cobalt blue flowers that emerge from purple-black buds on dark stems and is a hummingbird magnet. Another hummingbird favorite is *Salvia spathacea*, sometimes called pitcher sage.

When the blooms of these spiky racemes are spent, remove them to encourage additional flowering. In late July if your plant begins to look overgrown or tired, you can prune about one-third of the plant and it will continue to grow and give blooms into autumn. They like to dry out between waterings.

You can see many of these wonderful sage varieties in the Sherwood Demonstration Garden which reopens to the public on April 1st. It's located behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. And don't forget the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale will be at the demonstration garden on April 23, 2016 from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Perennials, tomatoes, vegetables, and more will be sold at great prices.

There is no UCCE Master Gardener public education class this Saturday -- Happy Easter, everyone!

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.