



## **Salvias for my New Garden**

*by Nancy Hawkins, UC Master Gardener*

Little did I realize that when I agreed to a garage expansion for my husband's Mustang restoration project, I was also in for a garden restoration project. After the water-loving camellias, azaleas, and ferns were bulldozed from the north side of the old garage, I recognized the opportunity to establish a truly drought tolerant garden. Now, where to start? I checked the Master Gardener and City of Visalia websites for landscaping ideas and plants, and the plant *Salvia* came up over and over. So, that's what I considered first.

The name *Salvia* is derived from the Latin word, *salver*, which means: "to heal." As it happens, *Salvia* has been used for its herbal and medicinal qualities since ancient times. The genus *Salvia* offers gardeners one of the largest and most versatile groups of plants available. Since the 1970's, this genus has produced some of the most popular garden ornamentals. *Salvias* can be used as ground covers, bedding plants, herbaceous perennials and shrubs. A relative of the familiar kitchen sage, many types of *Salvias* produce spikes of small, densely packed flowers atop aromatic foliage. These heat- and drought-tolerant beauties bloom from early to late summer in shades of blue, violet, red, pink, and white. Plants can grow between 18 inches and 5 feet tall, depending on the variety.



**Red and Blue *Salvia***

The genus offers a wide range of forms, textured foliage and vibrantly colored flowers that combine well with most other plants in the landscape. Many species attract hummingbirds, butterflies and bees, but fortunately, not deer and rabbits. It is the scent of their leaves, one we humans find so inviting, that acts as a foul-smelling repellent to garden pests.

They are adaptable to almost any garden condition, from full sun to partial sun, and there are a few that will tolerate full shade. *Salvia* has often been called "the perfect garden plant." The challenge is to choose the best varieties that are at home in our climate. Nineteen species trace their origins to California, and many water-wise area gardeners now want to return these native plants to their landscapes. Most *Salvias* are drought tolerant, once established, and actually rebel at excessive summer irrigation.



**Cardonna *Salvia***

*Salvia* is best planted in the late fall or spring, spacing plants 1 to 3 feet apart, depending on the variety and the ultimate size of the plant. Select a site according to light needs and well-drained soil. Loosen the soil to a depth of 12 to 15 inches, then mix in a 2- to 4-inch layer of compost. Dig a hole twice the diameter of the pot the plant is in. Carefully remove the plant from its container, loosen the root ball, and place it in the hole so the

top of the root ball is level with the soil surface. Carefully fill in around the root ball and firm the soil gently. Water thoroughly. Apply a thin layer of compost each spring, followed by a 2-inch layer of mulch to retain moisture and control weeds. Water the plants frequently until established, and occasionally during our hot summers.

While *Salvia* isn't a high maintenance plant, it can suffer occasional bouts with fungal diseases and infestations of aphids or thrips. Some species also fall prey to slugs and snails. Treat as you would other plants with these problems.

Now that I have done my research, you can be sure my new garden will include a number of salvias to cover the scar created by the Mustang restoration project.

### Native *Salvias* for Central Valley Gardens

Botanical Name	Common Name	Growth Habit	Height (Ft)	Width (Ft)	Color	Blooms	Comments
<i>Salvia apiana</i>	<b>White or Bee Sage</b>	Coarsely branched	4	4 -5	Lavender	Spring	Bees love foliage
<i>S. brandegei</i>	<b>Brandegee Sage</b>	Green, bushy shrub	4-5	5-7	Lavender	Spring	Good cut flowers
<i>S. clevelandii</i>	<b>Cleveland Sage</b>	Domelike shrub	3-5	5-8	Blue-Purple	Summer	Most popular <i>Salvia</i>
<i>S. columbariae</i>	<b>Chia</b>	Erect annual	2 in.	1	Amethyst Blue	Spring	Open sunny place
<i>S. leucophylla</i>	<b>Bee's Bliss</b>	Low, round shrub	2-4	6	Lavender Pink	Summer	Good under oaks
<i>S. leucophylla</i>	<b>'Figuroa' Gray Sage</b>	Compact hybrid	3-4	4	Lavender Pink	Summer	Good on dry, sunny bank
<i>S. leucophylla</i>	<b>'Amethyst' Bluff'</b>	Low mound shrub	5	10	Rosy Pink	Summer	Controls erosion
<i>S. mellifera</i>	<b>Black Sage</b>	Round, dense shrub	3-5	3-5	Pale Lavender	Spring	Nectar for bees
<i>S. sonomensis</i>	<b>Creeping Sage</b>	Forms mat, creeps	8-12 inches	3-4	Lavender Blue	Spring	Must have good drainage
<i>S. sonomensis</i>	<b>'Mrs. Beard'</b>	Hybrid shrub	2	4-6	Pale Lavender	Spring	Edges dry beds, paths
<i>S. spathacea</i>	<b>Hummingbird Sage</b>	Creeps, forms mats	1-3	3-4	Magenta	Spring	Cool sun, part shade

August 21, 2014