



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Salvias for my New Garden (September 10, 2022)

By Nancy Hawkins, Tulare/Kings Counties 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 1970s, 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.



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.

Salvia is best planted in the late fall or early spring, spacing plants 1 to 3 feet apart, depending on the variety and the ultimate size of the plant. Select a site according to sunlight needs with 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

Salvia apiana, White or Bee Sage, grows 4' high x 4'-5' wide with lavender flowers that bees love

S. brandegei, Brandegee Sage, grows 4-5' high x 5-7' wide with lavender flowers

S. clevelandii, Cleveland Sage, has blue-purple flowers and grows 3-5' high x 5-8' wide

S. leucophylla, Bee's Bliss Low, is a round shrub 2-4' high x 6' wide with lavender-pink flowers that is considered good to grow under oaks.

S. leucophylla, 'Figueroa' Gray Sage, grows 3-4' high x 4' wide with lavender-pink flowers that grows well on dry, sunny banks

S. leucophylla, 'Amethyst Bluff', is a mounding shrub 5' high x up to 10' wide with rosy-pink flowers that is particularly good at erosion control on a hillside

S. mellifera, Black Sage, is a round, dense shrub 3-5' high and wide with pale lavender flowers

S. sonomensis, Creeping Sage, forms a mat 8-12" high and 3-4' wide with lavender-blue flowers. Requires good drainage

S. sonomensis, 'Mrs. Beard', grows 2' tall and 4-6' wide with lavender flowers

S. spathacea, Hummingbird Sage, is a creeping variety that forms mats 1-3' tall x 3-4' wide with magenta flowers that prefers partial shade

The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Hanford Farmer's Market – 4th Thursday – 5-9 pm

Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm

Luis Nursery, Visalia - 2nd Sat./every month, 10 am-2 pm

Questions? Call us:

Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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