

SalviaNews

Victorian Salvia Study Group
A Branch of the Herb Society of Victoria

November/December 2002

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I am so sorry this News is so late. My son had a stroke and I had to fly to Queensland straight away. He is recovering ...little damage to his body but he lost the ability to speak or write, and he is only 43. The hospital system in Queensland is wonderful and now he is being taught to speak again. I left this house and garden in a turmoil. Five weeks later I returned to find that my precious plants had been watered and tended by VSSG members and the house, mail and etc organized by family and neighbours. A bonus for gardeners is the great caring friendship we are given. Barb Wicks enabled me to have time away from hospitals and a lunch with some members of The Perennial Poppies Group and an opportunity to see some great Queensland gardens. Next issue I will tell you about them.

We need a co- Editor-please. I don't like letting you down like this but I do need help. So one or more people with some computer and email skills would lighten the load. No experience necessary!! I have none!!

DISCLAIMER

A new group 'The Salvia Association of Australia Inc.' has been formed. The group is not to be confused with the Victorian Salvia Study Group which is a branch of the Herb Society of Victoria and has a very different emphasis. We are concerned with the study and cultivation of salvias, but have no commercial interest. We do of course sell plants at expos, garden shows, etc. to raise money for the extension and upkeep of our OPCA collection.

The forthcoming Expo, being advertised currently in horticultural publications and programs, should be titled 'The First Annual Expo of the Salvia Association of Australia Inc.'

The authentic 'Second Salvia Expo of the Victorian Salvia Study Group' will be held during the early part of 2004.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

January 18 & 19 **Visit to Judi Forrester & Otway Herbs**
155 Biddles Road, Apollo Bay
03 52 376 318

Our visit to Apollo Bay includes a stop in Geelong on the Saturday to visit Bill & Shirley Whitehead's garden and the Geelong Botanical Gardens. If you decide to attend both days and require accommodation, please contact Judi to arrange on 03 52 376 318.

February 16 **Nobelius Workshop**
11.00am **BYO Lunch to share**

Nobelius Heritage Park is in Emerald. Turn into Beaconsfield Rd. at the Emerald Community Hall, then turn left into Creighton Rd. Follow this road through the Park entrance following directions for the Heritage Museum. The Salvia Garden is immediately below the Museum

March 30 **Cockatoo Plant Market**
9am-2pm **Follow the signs once in Cockatoo**
 Salvias for sale
 Volunteers welcome to assist

More information regarding the Cockatoo Plant Market will be in the next issue of SalNews.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY cont'd

April 20 **Meg Bentley's – 'The Botany of a Salvia'**
11.00am **3 Fords Road, Gruyere**
 BYO Lunch to share

May 18 **Hampton Workshop**
11.00am **21 Barnett Street, Hampton**
 BYO Lunch to share

Rosebud News

At last a few notes re the salvias growing in my garden conditions. We moved here exactly 12 months ago, bringing most of my beloved salvias with me in 7.5cm pots. They have suffered several moves around the evolving gardens since then (with a few losses) as I try to find the right location for them. It has been 12 months of removing old, overgrown shrubs, planting many new plants and trying to get used to VERY sandy soil, and due to large gums on and adjoining our property, often a very dry and in parts shady garden.

So far the salvias thriving in these conditions are *Salvia Waverley*, which has been flowering for 12 months; *S. guaranitica*, suckering everywhere, but beautiful. *Salvia* 'Purple Majesty' grew huge and swamped other plants nearby, I cut it back hard and it said Good-Bye! *Salvia* Costa Rican Blue is also thriving in both sun and semi-shade. Of course *S. leucantha* is enjoying the conditions, (is there any where it doesn't grow well?) *Salvia uliginosa* is struggling along, and has just been transferred to a large pot keep the moisture up to it (*and it is a good idea too to confine it to stop it spreading*). *Salvia discolor* is doing quite well under a bottlebrush with regular deep watering. *Salvia splendens* van Houttei, like *S. Waverley* is thriving in sheltered dry parts of the garden and it looks like it will flower continuously.

Salvia dorisiana, *S. forskahlei*, *S. oppositiflora* and *S. rubescens* are all doing very well in semi-shaded places with regular watering.

Favourite salvias:-

I was trying to work out which was my favourite. Difficult task? Maybe *Salvia spathacea* because of its unusual colour and flower formation. Looks like it will travel far and wide with mulch and regular watering. *Salvia dombeyii* rates because I can at last grow it. It flowered brilliantly on a semi-shaded, sheltered fence with mulch and regular water. Hope my luck will extend to more than one year. Then there is *Salvia gesneriiflora* which has been making a dramatic statement against a bare fence in a dryish part shaded part of the garden for months now. *Salvia corrugata*, and *S. sagittatus* 'Mosquito' are hard to go past as I love blue flowers, *S. 'Waverley'* is always in flower attracting the native birds, and *S. leucantha* looks good despite of tough conditions, *S. chiapensis* I would choose for its foliage alone as well as *S. argentea*.

How to choose from these and the many other fabulous salvias? And probably my favourites will change as I find those best suited to my garden.

Happy gardening.

Wendy Smith

Queensland News

The harsh winter has gone and now the harsh summer has begun with a vengeance! October has been very hot with drying winds that do a great deal of harm to the garden however our wonderful salvias keep on flowering and seem to thrive on it. *Salvia purpurea* is having another flush whilst *Salvia Costan Rican Blue* continues to create a sensation. *Salvia sagittatus* 'Mosquito' is coming into bloom and *S. lanceolata* is a mass of rose coloured flowers. New comer *S. lavanduloides* is well in bloom and *Salvia* 'Omaha Gold' with its gold leaf margins is a picture flowering amongst pink cleomes.

There are still a few flowers on *Salvia involucrata* 'Pink Icicles' and *S. iodantha* is a mass of colour. I hope they continue to flower and are in bloom for our open weekend on 16/17 November. My collection of old-fashioned roses look fabulous amongst the soft pastels of so many of the salvias.

It was interesting to hear Simon Ardill speak at the National Herb Conference in South Australia in September. The list of salvias that he presented that thrive in the Goolwa region (approx 300m from the Southern Ocean) was amazing. 99% of them do well for us in SE Queensland. What versatile plants salvias are!

On our garden tours that were part of the conference I was amazed to see *Salvia. semi atrata* growing thickly to at least 1m – it will grow for us but is a little temperamental, however it is well worth the effort! Most of the grey leafed species are not suited to our climate however at the moment several of us seem to have healthy specimens of *S. canariensis* – if we get a wet summer they may not look so good!

I brought back from my travels a few new salvias (to us) – *Salvia microphylla var microphylla*, *S. microphylla* Margaret's Rose, a salvia species from chiapas, *S. holwayii* and *S. greggi* 'Pink Royal'. A couple of nepetas also were added to my collection – *citriodora* and *superba* – they look wonderful under roses and salvias. There appears to be many *Salvia microphylla* crosses around that may be worth reproducing – a little confusion reigns in this area! All the *microphyllas* are looking superb as are the *greggiis*.

Salvia muirii I mentioned in the last news is certainly looking like a winner – continual mauve flowers and a great edging plant. *Salvia* 'Phyllis Fancy', a variation of *S. 'Waverley'*, has now reached a metre and looks to be as great a plant as 'Waverley' – slightly bluer flower.

I hope when I next report I am able to tell of good rainfall – the country areas are really suffering.

Barb Wickes

Only a little news from Eltham

Woe is me! I've had death in the garden! Two salvia I had have expired; the lovely small *S. discolor* I bought at the Expo was growing quite well then gradually one side of it drooped and withered then the whole plant. (*I have one for you, no one can not have S. discolor!*!) The other one that has died is *Salvia splendens* 'van houtii'. It grew and bloomed then phut! it died. On the other hand a cutting I took from it, though small, is going quite well.

The two *Salvia lyrata* I saved from an early death have, even though small, just bloomed. A fairly average blue flower but they more than make up for that with their very nice two-toned foliage. Also two-toned is the *S. 'Omaha Gold'* which has also flowered. They seem to have a rather unusual habit of their bud bent and drooping down. It is a rather handsome plant, I think. I've read up about *Salvia dorisiana* in Clebsch's book and it sounds a little more difficult but at the moment it is looking great, as she says it is a winter bloomer I guess I'll have to wait and see if it survives the summer for a start. *Salvia buchananii* is just coming into bloom again but several of the *greggi* I haven't seen in flower yet. That's a pleasure in store for me. I'm delighted with *S. corrugata*; I pruned it well and it has thickened up and always looks green and lush. I have several salvias that I don't know the name of so will have to keep my eyes open for similar ones in flower.

Liz Damaschi's garden is always a delight and it is stuffed full of salvias. I'm always agog at her *S.gesneriiflora* 'Tequila', never without a flower. She lost *S. madrensis* a few months ago and that's another one of mine that expired; I have ordered another of these. I am really jealous of her *S. canariensis* which has grown apace and mine is still only about a foot high, oh, well patience.

Not a lot to report but looking forward to more flowers to gloat over.

Paddy Childs Green

Mount Eliza News

For many years I grew bog sage in my cottage garden not knowing it was of the salvia family. Sage was a much prized herb in ancient times, it was thought to prolong life and increase wisdom by strengthening the memory--- whence the name. However, my first introduction to growing salvias was when I bought an unidentified plant from Ann Creber's property. On arriving home to Mount Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula, I found a spot in my cottage garden and planted it. The salvia grew tall and strong, giving out clusters of blue flowers, can anyone identify it from this behaviour? Success, or so I thought until the third year of its growth, when it overshadowed the roses and the plants I had in the same bed. I cut it back savagely but this only served to strengthen the plant which left me no option but to take it out.

This year, however, I read in the 'Herbage' that the Salvia Study Group was holding a demonstration of pruning at the property of Jillian Barkell. I had known Jillian for many years so decided to visit Jillian and the group to further my knowledge of this mystery plant!

On that day, Trudi arrived with a basket of assorted salvias in glorious colours and shapes and I was given cuttings (still unidentified by me), but my success with their propagation has prompted me to become a member of the group and one day to be able to identify each and every one!

Trish Clemence

Kalorama News

Note - no longer Macclesfield News! Yes, I have moved to a totally different climate on the other side of the mountain. The garden is a mixture of English along with some natives and every imaginable weed possible on 2.5 acres with not a single salvia planted. I have an area for the nursery which is very different to the set up at Macclesfield. I still occasionally sell at Kallista Market (first Saturday of the month) but the focus is more on selling from home and I would welcome visitors anytime provided you ring me first to make a convenient time for both of us. All plants are available at a discounted price. New address is 62 Falls Road, Kalorama, new telephone number is 9728 1335 or try my mobile 0412 766 763.

Donna Grundy

REFLECTIONS ON COLOUR

As some wise person once said (in effect) sometimes we see the forest but not the trees. Rewards for close observation are all about us, especially in the Salvia world.

At present *Salvia argentea* is blooming just near the back door. As you glance at it, it is a stately mass of white flowers on several branches. But! Look again! It is on a closer inspection that rewards are to be had.

Leaves and stems are all that silver fur like frost on a winter morning making the whole plant look like a Christmas tree. Then there are the flowers. One pristine white flower with its soft green furry calyx is placed so carefully next to a baby- a bud yet to open. This is where the close observation really comes to the fore; that bud is not white, it is really a soft cream tipped with a hint of pink. The flower; it is SO white, yet there is still a hint of the cream of babyhood reminding one of milk. The pink tip turns out to be a collection of hairs on the hood, each hair is coloured a rich burgundy. These hairs emerge from the snow white petal. As if to add the final touch, the stigma has a tip coated with rich French ultramarine blue.

There is another white *Salvia* out now in our garden too. This is also a treat on closer inspection. But you've probably guessed it by now! *Salvia apiana* is absolutely splendid. Our plant is about three years old and is in a disused vegie bed that is particularly dry. With it is *Salvia fruticosa* and *S. somalensis*. All are doing well and flowering. *Salvia apiana* is a picture as it has flopped about and grown up again, now having approx. twenty stems over an area of 1.5x1.5m, now reaching 2m high with flowers up all stems.

Just imagine the colour. There is pale silvery green/ blue leaf and stem mass, topped by white dotted towers that are the flowering stems.

Close inspection shows yellow dots as buds intermingled with the whites of the flowers. Each flower is pure white with its frilly labellum and comical shape, but it has an anther each side with yellow pollen. Often, the flowers are interspersed with yellow buds and, as with *S.argentea*, the stigma has the slightest hint of blue at the tip.

These are two gems to be treasured.

Velda Ellis

The Salvia Display at the Herb Expo - 26th & 27th October 2002

Recently, the Herb Society of Victoria held a two day Herb Expo in the hall and grounds of the Horticultural College at Burnley.

The *Salvia* Study Group of Victoria attended and put on a great display of *Salvias* and did a marvellous job with plant sales outside in the 'Sunken Garden'.

There were quite a number of other displays on show especially the wonderfully set out information stand put on by the Royal Botanic Gardens' Renee Weirzbicki, the Curator of the Herb Garden, with 'Herby' things to make and do, put on by the Plant Craft Cottage... this was of course both interesting and entertaining not only for the young folk but the adults as well.

Judi Forrester of 'Otway Herbs' travelled all the way from Apollo Bay and produced some wonderful homemade ointments and rubs, plant seeds and a great range of medicinal and culinary herbs with a few rare, exotic plants grown from seed collected in the wilds of China...Italy and the Mediterranean, from Judi's previous trips.

The *Salvia* Study Group will make a trip to visit Judi in the new year on **January 18 & 19** We all missed out last year due to illness, accidents or absentees!

There was a lot of catching up to do between old friends and making new acquaintances and as we all know... there is nothing quite like an Expo of any sort, to meet people and learn more about plants in general.

The Study Group displayed various *Salvia* species in flower... in both large and small containers also photographs of *Salvias* from Mexico and South Africa which shows the versatility of the species and the adaptability to our hot, dry climate.

At the back of our display, nearest the wall, we placed a large map displaying *Salvias* from around the world and each country marked with an arrow. This, in turn, brought about an interesting observation made by one lady who came up to me and remarked that Sweden was not marked on the map with an arrow, why is this so?

Through my conversation with the lady, I learned that she had grown some wonderful plants of *Salvia officinalis*, which by the way were grown outside and not effected by the cold climate in Stockholm... where she had lived for so long. I found this quite interesting... to think that in some countries where it gets freezing cold, *Salvia officinalis* has to be housed indoors, out of the cold, yet there... in Sweden it grew so well out of doors. Aren't we lucky in Australia... we only have to worry if the poor plants will get through our heat and dry!

Meg Bentley

Local Cultivars of Common Salvias

Common garden sage is the most well known member of the salvia family and has the botanical species name *officinalis*. From a cursory reading of all my *Salvia News* I find little has been said of its cultivars which may be available to us in Victoria, possibly some readers of the *Salvia News* may not know much about them.

The cultivated varieties, or cultivars of the above species which I possess at present, and those I have possessed in the past and which may still be available to us in Victoria are:

***Salvia officinalis* 'Albiflora'** ...white flowered common sage.

To the best of my knowledge, I introduced this to the newly formed *Salvia Study Group* at the commencement of its Collection. It is almost totally identical to common sage, with the one exception being its white coloured flowers. I don't believe it is very long living, but I have obtained seeds from its flowers, which have provided plants occasionally. Two years ago I purchased this plant from Sue Templeton but it only lived one year. At present I don't have one. I am not aware of its existence in our official Collection or in members gardens.

***Salvia officinalis* 'Rosea'**...pink flowered common sage.

As with the previous one, I introduced this cultivar to the newly formed *Salvia Study Group* at the commencement of the Collection. This plant again is almost totally identical to common sage with the one exception being its pink coloured flowers. I have had this plant, or its successors, growing beautifully in my garden for at least 15 years. I have not tried to cultivate it from cuttings, although I believe this would be quite easy. Its seeds profusely and these have been used for propagation, Again I am not aware if any exist in our official Collection or in the gardens of our members.

(Personal comment from Meg...re *S. officinalis* 'Rosea'. It seems to be longer lived and hardier than the other *officinalis* varieties. It also grows very well at the Hampton Garden—quite aged and ready for renewal, and performs very well at Gruyere too)

Salvia officinalis 'Tricolor'

Of all the salvias I have grown this one has almost exhausted all my patience, I don't believe it is an annual, but in my experience I never seem to get much more than about a year before it succumbs. Occasionally I find them in nurseries, and recently bought two small pots. One is still alive. I'm trying to find the right growing conditions.

The cultivar name refers to the colour of its leaves, and quoting Sutton, "the leaves are grey-green with broad cream margins, When young they have an attractive pink to purple flush which fades as they age". For me they never flower as they don't live long enough. But quite a few years ago, I was surprised to see a large bush of Tricolor actually bearing deep blue flowers, at the former Herbage Nursery in Ballarat, which at that time was owned by The Herbage Editor and her colleague.

Salvia officinalis 'Purpurescens' Purple leafed common sage.

Quoting Sutton again, he says. "this was the most common sage grown in English gardens in the 18th century. It has reddish purple foliage and violet-purple flowers".

It is occasionally seen in local nurseries and is fairly easy to grow, although at present I do not have one. (*The border planted at the Nobelius Garden in 1992 is still thriving with regular pruning and also flowers well*).

Salvia officinalis 'Icterina' Green and gold coloured leaves...common sage

Again Sutton says, "the central area of the leaf is green with a broad margin of pale golden yellow. The proportions of patterns of these vary from leaf to leaf".

This plant grows in a prostrate fashion and in my experience it never flowers. It is well worth growing for its beautiful foliage. I also notice this sage cultivar occasionally in local nurseries, although at present I do not possess one.

The above common sages are those I am familiar with locally, however Meg and other members may be aware of and actually possess others. Yeo in her book quotes 16 cultivars, whilst Clebsch and Sutton both quote around 12 cultivars. The botanical names I have used are identical to those used by Yeo, Clebsch and Sutton in their books.

The quotes used in this article I have taken from "The Gardener's Guide to Growing Salvias" by John Sutton.

Bill Whitehead – Geelong

SALVIA SNIPPETS

We all know how hardy salvias are, but did you know how resilient they are? Well take Trudi's salvias, in the heat of summer a few years ago, most of her large leaf Sth. American salvias were reduced to mere sticks, but a cool change and a good bout of rain really helped those poor plants. In no time at all there were little green shoots appearing to say "yes we are still here".

And then in England, where a poor man thought he had lost all his salvias when his property was flooded for over a week, again they were reduced to mere sticks, but with a few sunny days to dry everything out and good drainage, by the next spring there were little green shoots appearing. It goes to show that salvias can survive in surprisingly adverse conditions.

For those poor people who have rabbit problems salvias are wonderful as rabbits can't stomach them. *Lavandula stoechas* is another plant rabbits don't really like.

As you may already know, *Salvia microphylla* easily crosses with *Salvia greggii*. So if you have quite a few growing together don't be surprised if you find a few seedlings coming up. Unfortunately you have to wait until they flower to find out if the colour is significantly different from anything that is growing, (in other words, is it worthwhile keeping it for propagating). If it is similar in colour to another, it is not worthwhile keeping as it will only add to the confusion. But if the foliage is distinctively different it might be worthwhile.

One of the exciting things about salvia crosses is which parent is going to show the dominating features. In the case of *Salvia lycoides x greggii*, this has purple-blue flowers with blue-green calyces that bloom over a long period. This is a small bushy shrub with narrow upright leaves. But the reverse cross of *Salvia greggii x lycoides* is quite different with deep reddish- purple flowers that have very dark calyces. Something to look for in nurseries and garden centres.

Lyndi Garnett

Salvia Musings from Sheila - Editor of Herbage

Now for a little bit of pedanticism! You probably know by now that I am died-in-the-wool pedantic. The word 'salvia' is an English word and so it is correct when referring to more than one to use the plural form 'salvias'. It is not a proper noun and so is not capitalised. The word *Salvia* is a Latin word and is always used with at least one other Latin word, the two together making up the name of a plant species. *Salvia* is always capitalised (this a taxonomer's rule, not a Latin one) and, because it is in a language other than English it is always italicised. Now that you have read my bit of pedanticism, Trudi, you need to take no further action. You must feel free to capitalise or not, italicise or not, (in fact the thought of a pedantic Trudi is quite terrible). But this might explain why I sometimes make minor changes to salvia articles from you and others in the salvia group when I put them into *The Herb Age*. You can probably tell from some of the botanical names I have used here that I have a lot to learn about salvia naming, such a trial for a true pedant.

Sheila Fox

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