

Salvia News

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Victorian Salvia Study Group Inc

www.salvias.org.au

Summer 2025

VICTORIAN SALVIA STUDY GROUP inc

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Find us on  **Salvia Study Group Vic**

THE AIMS OF THE SALVIA STUDY GROUP ARE:

1. To grow and collect Salvias for the purpose of enjoyment and study.
2. To promote and encourage the growing of Salvias.
3. To correctly name existing and new Salvias.
4. To maintain our Display Garden at Nobelius Heritage Park for the Group and the general public.

The Group is a Not for Profit Organisation. Any monies received are used to run the Group's activities and for the planting and maintenance of our GPCAA (Garden Plants Conservation Association of Australia) registered garden collection. (Note: 'Plant's Trust' is now the commonly used abbreviation for GPCAAA.).

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Welcome to our last *Salvia News* for 2025. It has been another busy Salvia Year with our oh-so-lovely garden visits, the specialist plant sales we participate in, and the usual sprinkling of our other Salvia Group occasions.

The recent spring rains should set our gardens up for summer, and give all those plants some of us acquired at the Spring sales (and elsewhere!) a head start. Most of the time, as we all know, and thank goodness for it, salvias are drought-tolerant. But, for those that do succumb to the summer heat, a drink of rain or tap water will soon help them recover. On a personal note, I lost my much-loved *Salvia iodantha* during that hot, dry January/February at the beginning of the year. Luckily, its companion *S. purpurea*, also a favourite, survived and it now waits for its new iodantha neighbour to grow up a bit so the new pair can happily flower along together, as previously.

Our contributors have again done us proud with the articles and photos they provide for each edition. We

are very thankful to these members and we are also grateful to the editors of The Australian Weekend Magazine, Flourish and Growing Australian, who have allowed us to reprint articles from their magazines that we thought would be of interest to our readers.

Finally, Season's Greetings to all our members and their families, and Happy Summer Gardening,

Andreina



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**Copy deadline for the next edition of Salvia News is
 1st February 2026**

Please email your articles and photos to: salvia.newsletter@gmail.com

Cover Photo is *Salvia microphylla* ‘Hot Lips’. Photo from VSSG website.

Please check website for dates and times for any event
in case of errors or a cancellation.

www.salvias.org.au

Read more of what's happening next year on page 16.

FEBRUARY SUN 15TH | Garden Visit to Maureen Scoble's no fuss garden | 8 Riverview St, Avondale Heights – 11am

A lovely garden with so much packed into a small space.

Enquiries: Lyndi Garnett Ph 9803 4534.

MARCH SAT 7TH & SUN 8TH | Ferny Creek Collectors and Rare Plant Sale | 100 Hilton Rd, Sassafras – 10am-4pm

All the new season's bright coloured Salvias available. Match your Salvia colour with your garden.

Both editions of the new Salvia book will be available. Place your orders in early to avoid disappointment.

Email your wish list: lgarnett844@gmail.com

Enquiries: Lyndi Garnett Ph 9803 4534.

MARCH SAT 22ND | Garden Visit to Lyn Cannard's garden | 620 Dickens Rd, Freshwater Creek, Geelong – 11am

Lyn's beautiful cut flower paddock and her Dahlias are a must to see, as well as a garden full of Salvias and perennials.

Tear yourself away to have lunch at the nearby Cottage Farm Perennial Nursery.

MARCH SAT 22ND | Cottage Farm Perennials | 1985 Barrabool Rd, Gnarwarre – Geelong – 1.30pm

Bring a plate to share. Enjoy Chris's garden, with so many interesting plants to find and identify.

Visit her nursery and purchase that special plant you've been wanting.

Enquiries: Lyndi Garnett Ph 9803 4534.



Any queries, contact Lyndi Ph: 9803 4534 Email: lgarnett844@gmail.com

Meg's Book Launch

Text and photos by Pat Anderson

On Tuesday, 9th September, I was proud to attend the launch of the revised book – *A Manual for Salvia Growers* – of group member, Meg Bentley. Many members will already have a copy of Meg's original text (2004) or will have consulted photos at the back of the book at the various plant stalls where the group was selling salvias. This revised version is something again.

Meg has been an active volunteer horticulturalist at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne for decades. She has worked closely with Terry Smyth, the curator of the Southern China Collection, and, in 1996, went on a collecting expedition with the group in south-west China. She has also donated many plants to the Southern African, North American Drylands, Medicinal and Herb Collections, as well as to the Sensory Garden. She is regarded as their salvia expert, helping with identification and selecting the best locations for planting. So, it was appropriate that the book launch was located at the gardens and promoted by the Philanthropy Group.

What a splendid occasion it was. So many people were gathered, including well-known garden gurus like Jane Edmondson and Stephen Ryan (also the curator of Plant Trust), staff and volunteers of the RBG, family and friends. The gallery in Domain House was beautifully set out with a splendid morning tea (including Meg's trademark *S. dorisiana* sponge), framed drawings and paintings of Meg's,

and lovely vases of salvias and related flowers.

The official part of the occasion was introduced by Clare Hart, the director of horticulture at the Gardens, who welcomed everybody and gave the context of the launch. This was followed by Terry Smyth, one of the many horticulturalists who noted Meg's years of contribution and the tips she had learnt from Meg on such topics as propagation of salvias. Finally, Meg, looking very relaxed and happy, thanked the various people who had both helped bring the new book to fruition as well as making the occasion possible.

The book itself is beautifully presented and, to quote Terry Smith, "..... is brimming with information – lists to assist you in selecting salvias for any microclimate. Meg highlights salvia species for flowers, form, texture and fragrance. There are sections for colour and wildlife. You will find a clear explanation of salvia botany. Her exquisite botanical drawings are included as well as diagrams explaining flower parts and leaf shapes."

Meg shares her experience in a clear, easy-to-read manner. No salvia gardener should be without a copy. Hearty congratulations, Meg, on such a great achievement. I was indeed proud to be present on this occasion and to purchase my own signed copy of this new book.





Meg Bentley

A remarkable contributor

An avid gardener with a passion for *Salvias*, Meg Bentley is also a highly regarded mentor and educator in the Garden's community. She has contributed to various projects across the Gardens, recently supporting apprenticeships and field trip opportunities for Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria staff to collect new and rare plants for the Living Collections. Her generous spirit demonstrates a mission to foster connection and learning through plants.

At her home in Gruyere, amongst the bushland of the Yarra Valley, Meg tends to a beautiful rambling garden. Grasses

grow for birds to weave their nests, and fences were removed so wildlife can freely roam. "My garden is more wildlife than decorative, plant-wise", she admits. This is where Meg has hosted famous morning teas for Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria staff, sharing plant knowledge and cuttings from her expansive salvia collection.

Volunteering "on and off" at Melbourne Gardens for over 20 years, Meg holds the title of "The first and last volunteer horticulturist – a special exception," she smiles. "Since my husband passed away, I now come to the Gardens weekly".

These days, Meg looks after all the Lamiaceae across Melbourne Gardens – salvia, lavender, plectranthus, thyme, coleus. “With plants you never stop learning, to get your hands in this soil is very special,” she says. From her time interacting with ‘the horties’, an affectionate name for the Gardens’ Horticulture team, Meg knows firsthand how important apprenticeships are to the future of our landscapes and plant conservation. “Everyone plays their part in the garden, which is vital. You take one person out, and you’ve got a hole,” she says. Supporting the Apprenticeship programs at the Gardens is one of many ways in which Meg contributes. “For young people to have the opportunity to develop knowledge and build their experience and career in this garden is invaluable,” says Meg.

Meg’s connection to the Gardens is testament to her profound generosity and passion for sharing plant knowledge, not only with the Horticulture team, but all those who have the privilege of crossing her path. Meg fondly recalls time spent in the Sensory Garden – a project she helped bring to life. “You get the chance to meet so many different people who love to talk about the variety of plants,” says Meg. “They’ve seen how the garden started and how the plants are happily progressing. It’s a wonderful community conversation place”. In an age where most people walking the Tan will have earbuds in or be on their phones, Meg reflects, “the people you see walking around the Gardens – they’re always attentive to what’s going on around them – it’s a sensory experience and it’s always such a pleasure to witness those appreciating it”.

Meg is making the final updates to a pamphlet on salvias she created in 1998 and revised in 2004.



This update brings 70 new salvias into the fold, a task affectionately referred to as her ‘PhD’ from dear friend and fellow Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria *Horticulturalist*, Terry Smyth. Meg encourages more people to learn about salvias, a remarkable endeavour to make plant knowledge accessible.

“Meg’s kindness, measured approach, capability and knowledge sharing is exemplary.”

– Clare Hart, Acting Executive Director Melbourne Gardens Horticulture

Meg’s support and impact are far reaching at the Gardens, and her legacy will continue through her heartfelt bequest. Her hope for the future lies in the gift she leaves, directed towards continuing the urgent conservation work achieved through the Global Collection program. In her lifetime, Meg has grown over 400 species and cultivars of *Salvia*, though not all have survived the challenges faced in our warming climate. “To record specimens into the database, before things are damaged and lost forever, that is so important,” Meg says. “And to ensure the Gardens can continue to update and maintain the National Herbarium.” She adds, “Mind you, I don’t plan on going anywhere anytime soon!”

OPPOSITE

Meg hosts members of ‘the horties’ at her home.

ABOVE

Meg Bentley at work in the Melbourne Gardens.

Our thanks to Sophie Weedon from the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria magazine “*Flourish*” for kindly allowing us to republish this article, which appeared in the Autumn 2025 edition of that magazine.

Spring to Summer in Avondale

Text by Maureen Scoble, Photos VSSG Website

I am writing this at Avondale in early Spring. I live in the West of Melbourne on an ordinary suburban block. My garden has had many reincarnations over the years and hopefully many more lie ahead. I am constantly on the lookout for new plants, or should I say plants I don't have? I really don't care if they are new or not. When I buy a plant, the label goes into a photo album ... I have several albums now. Let me tell you, those albums are a perfect graveyard of plants that I have loved and lost. Some plants I have tried multiple times, but for whatever reason, they don't like me.

Walking around my garden this morning, quite early, was just lovely. Beautiful blue sky and a perfect temperature after our cold Winter. The garden itself doesn't look absolutely beautiful just now. I cut back most things quite savagely in Winter, so it takes them a while to come back. Some don't. If you doubt my prowess with the secateurs, just ask Lyndi! Some of my Salvias get a bit nipped by the frost over Winter. Temperatures here can get down to 0 degrees sometimes. Not as bad as it could be. Most of my plants manage okay, although the "So Cool" range and the *S. greggii* get a change in their leaf colour. The plus side is that even with funny coloured leaves, they are nearly ready to flower. Also in flower very early is *S. 'Royal Bumble'*. This is one tough plant. I do like it very much. A good colour and very amenable.

Another plant that really intrigues me is *S. oxyphora*. I grow it at Avondale, and it grows well enough, although I notice it follows the water. I also grow it at the Mission to Seafarers, where I do a charity garden. At the Mission, *S. oxyphora* not only grows well in awful grey sand, but it has been flowering for over a month... before the start of Spring. *S. 'Amistad'* is the same. Perhaps the brick walls around the Mission give more protection? But the soil is so awful!

Quite early Spring and *S. 'Magenta Magic'* is in flower. One of my all-time favourites. I just love this colour, although for some reason I don't grow it as well as some others do. I have seen such big plants in other people's gardens. Here in Avondale, it seems happy enough, but doesn't

get outrageously wonderful. I now have 3 plants scattered around, and I'm hoping at least 1 will be outrageous.

What does look wonderful is a plum *Loropetalum* and also *Crambe Scaberima*. I got the latter from the Diggers Club many years ago. It has a million tiny white flowers held 1 metre high over a basal clump of leaves. Just fabulous. It self-seeds a little into my gravel, so I watch carefully to collect the babies.

We have just come back home after 2 weeks away. We spent time in Newcastle in N.S.W. and then drove along the Waterfall Way with our friends. Do you know it? The drive is from Armidale to the coast near Port Macquarie, and it is lovely. It takes a few days, and there are lots of waterfalls, so well worth the drive. Around Armidale, the country is so lush and green. I didn't visit any gardens, but I did see 2 hedges that looked good. One was *S. 'Hot Lips'* (!) and the other *S. leucantha*. Well, some new ideas anyway.

Back home, some more Salvias are recovering from their savage prune. *S. 'Angel Wings'* is flowering now, and it is so pretty. At Avondale, my plant is in full sun and the flowers are quite a dark pink with little darker splotches. At the Mission, it grows in that awful grey sand in part shade, and the pink is much softer. Also just starting is *S. 'Waverley'*, which is always reliable.

The rainfall here has been low again over Winter and Spring. I believe the dams are low again, so the promised wet Spring is not going to happen. Some parts of the State have fared better (lucky things). I hope your garden has all the rain it needs. I try not to water my established plants over Summer. I don't have a watering system, just a hand-held hose. As I was coming in this afternoon, I passed my plant of *S. clevelandii*. It isn't flowering, but the scent from the leaves is intoxicating. I think the common name is *S. 'Alan Chickering'*. Please get one if you can...it is tough too.



'Waverly'

Salvia 'Waverly'



Salvia 'Angel Wings'



Salvia 'Allen Chickering'

Differences between *Pratensis*, *Nemorosa* and *Superba* *Salvias*

Text and photos by Lyndi Garnett

Many of these plants are confusing, but all are herbaceous (Winter dormant), coming up again in Spring. There was some very good work done on describing these *Salvias* many years ago, but in recent years, most of these *Salvias* have been lumped under the *Nemorosa* banner; possibly because Nurserymen forgot to label correctly or just didn't bother to observe and study these plants. Subsequently, all these plants became confused with one another, labels got mixed up, and so they were lumped under one name, *Nemorosa*. These notes are what I have observed over the years looking at their growth habits. I hope I can show enough differences between these three groups of herbaceous *Salvias* for you to understand what might be growing in your garden. I would suggest that when all these plants are up and growing nicely that you can go out and correctly label your plants. I have not included *x sylvestris* notes as they are still being observed. For notes on individual hybrids, please go to the website, www.salvias.org.au

Pratensis:

- **Basal leaf growth:** producing a leafy clump before and during flowering.
- **Stems:** are branched, mainly green, 60-80cmH. Most stems are bare, with one or two small triangular leaves along stems. Depending on the age of the plant, quite a few stems can be produced per clump.
- **Leaves:** are large, broad, lanceolate, with long petioles and a very pointed tip. Most are a mid-green or a rich, deep colour. Only a few, small, triangular leaves are found beneath the branching stems and first flowers.
- **Flowers:** are large, a falcate type flower with a large space between the hood and the lower lobes, which opens up the throat area for insect access. Most have some markings on the bottom lobe around the throat to guide bees and pollinating insects to explore further into the flower. Flowers are in whorls, regularly positioned along the flower stem with the top flowers often open at the same time as the bottom, opened flowers. The flower heads could be as long as 20cmL. All flower stems are held well above the foliage to attract any passing bees and insects.
- **Flowering time:** coming into flower quickly, flowering from mid spring – October &

November until early summer – December/January/February.

- **Colours:** include mauves, purples, pinks and whites.

Nemorosa:

- **Basal leaf growth:** very little, if any, basal rosette growth. This may occur when the flowers are maturing, before the plant prepares to go down for winter.
- **Stems:** most stems in a clump are leafy flower stems, these can be single or branched, often coloured or have mottled stems, approx. 60cmH.

All stems are fully clothed with leaves up to the flower head or to the branching of the flower stem. The number of stems depends on the age of the clump, e.g., seed raised, cuttings or nursery bought in a pot.

- **Leaves:** are elongated lanceolate, with either a blunt point or a rounded tip and small crenulations around the edges. These are positioned alternately along the stem to maximise the amount of sunlight each leaf receives. The basal leaves begin with a small petiole and become sessile as they progress up the stem. Colours can range from a pale green to a mid green or even a blue grey colour. Leaves are found all along the flower stems.
- **Flowers:** are also a falcate type, but small, held in dense terminal spires, in whorls of 6 flowers, 3 flowers on either side of the stem. Beneath each whorl are found small colourful triangular bracts. Most fall off after the flowers have finished, but occasionally they remain as in spp 'Tesquicola' and 'Kate Glenn'.

There are often buds at the tip of the spire that don't open until the bottom flower finishes, a form of prolonging the flowering period. Most flower heads are long, 15-20cm, held way above the foliage to attract any passing bees and insects.

- **Flowering time:** is fairly early and quick from mid-spring, around October and November, continuing until February/March. If the stems are cut down after the first flush of flowers, around Christmas time, there is a good chance of another flush of flowers in the summer, taking the flowering time well into autumn.

- **Colours:** pale pinks, mauves, purples, blues, which are enhanced by the colours of the bracts, but NO whites.

Superba:

- **Basal leaf growth:** producing a basal rosette of leaves before sending up flower stems.
- **Stems:** these are small/short flower stems; 10cm, 20cm, 30cm or 40cmH. Stems can be branched or single, appearing shortly after the plant has produced the basal leafy clump.
- **Leaves:** these are all small/short, elongated lanceolate with a short petiole, mostly slender, being mid green to a deeper green. Very fine lobes can be seen around the edges, but others, e.g., 'Rubin' and 'Rose & Blue Marvel' have scalloped lobes along the edges, as these are crosses but still regarded as a x superba.

Only very small leaves appear on the stems beneath the flower head.

Often, after the main flowering period has finished, leaf growth appears at the end of stems. These leaves are small and pointed, seldom do they produce flowers.

- **Flowers:** are also a falcate type, but small, held in dense terminal spires, in whorls of 6 flowers, 3 flowers on either side of the stem. Each clump produces numerous flower stems, and, as these may be branched, many dense flower heads appear per plant.

There are often buds at the tip of the spire that don't open until the bottom flower finishes, which prolongs the flowering period. Flower heads being 10 – 15cmL. With 'Rubin' producing flowers 30cmH. These are held above the foliage to attract any passing bees or insects.

- **Flowering time:** Flowers appear a little later than the Nemorosa types, coming up quickly once the clump has formed, in mid to late spring, 'Maynight' being one of the earliest in October/ November. Most will be in flower around Christmas time, some beginning in early summer and continuing well into autumn, March/April.
- **Colours:** blues, mauves,

deep purples, whites and many shades of pink from very pale to cerise found in 'Rubin' and 'Rose Marvel'. The colours are not enhanced with colourful bracts, but may have coloured calyces on the deep purple varieties.

Notes:

All groups like full sun, are not fussed about soil, but must be well-drained.

Once established, these plants are tough and hardy for the summer season, especially if well mulched.

All need feeding in late winter before leaves appear. Feed again in autumn, just as they are going down to strengthen the roots and crown. Mulch the crown to keep warm from frost.

When cutting stems down, keep a few centimetres to act as markers, so they are not trodden upon nor accidentally dug up.

Keep labels with plants so no confusion or mix-ups.

Once established and the leaves mature, rabbits and wallabies will leave alone. Wire cloches are very handy when leaves first appear.

Many of the more recent hybrids being released are small and compact, most are Superba hybrids.

Many flower stems, free flowering with a longer flowering period.



Superba 'White Sensation'



Superba 'Marcus'



Pratensis 'Swan Lake'



Pratensis 'Skydance'



Nemorosa 'Caradonna'

Yea Open Gardens 2025

Text and photos by Julie Kavanah

Spring is a beautiful time to wander through gardens. Melbourne in spring is calm and sunny, or it could be cold and windy. You never know what to take when you plan to visit plant fairs and open gardens. You might have to pack raincoats and umbrellas, or sunhat and sunscreen. This is what makes attending spring events interesting.

With a group of friends, we ventured to Yea Open Gardens 2025. Yea is a small town 110kms north east of Melbourne at the junction of Yea and Goulburn Rivers. This year, there were five town gardens and three country gardens.

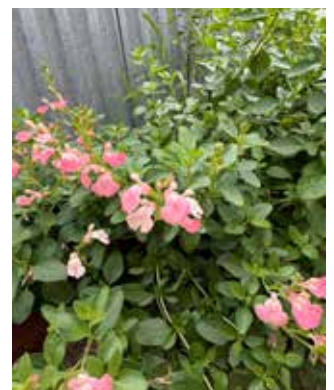
One of my favourite town gardens to visit was The Temperance Garden. The owner, Chris, purchased the property seven years ago, and there were only three trees on her property. She decided not to grow lawn because of the high maintenance plus low rainfall, and high summer

temperatures. Instead, she has a delightful low-maintenance garden with hardy plantings and marvellous sculptures. Of course, I was drawn to this garden because of the magnificent array of salvias that had been used. Many of my favourites such as *Salvia greggii* 'Alba', *Salvia* 'Heatwave Glow', *Salvia microphylla* 'Coconut Ice' and *Salvia* 'Tickled Pink'.

Another wonderful garden was David and Rosemary's, which is where the Yea Garden Club Plant Sale was held. As you walked around every corner of this garden, it presented a WOW moment. Their use of shade, tree heights and close planting meant that they had created inspiring rooms of delight. Though Rosemary stated that when they are both hand watering the front garden, especially in summer, they then look at each other and know that they still have the back garden to water! I was delighted to see her flowering *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' looked lush and healthy.



Salvia nemorosa
'Caradonna'



Salvia 'Coconut Ice'

However, my most favourite garden wasn't on the list for 2025. I had seen this town garden a few times before during the many years I have visited Yea Open Gardens. The owner is aging and hasn't the ability to look after the garden as she had in the past, but it was a real pleasure to meander through her overgrown but lush garden. The chooks were wandering around very happily, and the cat came up for many pats. This was a garden full of love and life. There were many varieties of salvias tucked away in between many other plant varieties.

The large country gardens were showy and well-maintained, each totally different from each other. The one that I considered more outstanding has been owned by the same family since 1924. Their ornamental dam, Lake Inferior, had meandering paths that wound around the lake and led to a gazebo that was nestled in between stunning rose bushes. I found a *Salvia* 'Black and Blue' which was just starting to flower. This perennial was in full sun, and the flowers were a deep blue with blackish calyx appearing through the medium height plant. In a few more weeks, it would be stunning.



Salvia 'Tickled Pink'



Salvia 'Heatwave Glow'



Salvia greggii 'Alba'

A Useful Plant – *Salvia Disermis*

Text and photo by Geoff Crowhurst

I have had this plant growing on my nature strip for a number of years, and can't remember from where I obtained it. From time to time, I give it a trim back, but apart from that, it looks after itself. This spring, however, it has spread to make a nice clump, as if demanding at least a little attention. According to Sima Eliovson (*Wild Flowers of South Africa, 1980*), it grows over quite a large area from the western Cape to Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and looks its best there in November. Sima considers it a good cut flower, which lasts well. Although there are 38 species of salvia in South Africa, Sima mentions only *S. aurea* in addition to *S. disermis* as being worthy garden plants. Betsy Clebsch (*The New Book of Salvias, Florilegium, 2003*) seems quite enamoured with this small salvia. She writes that it 'has a graceful and pleasing shape' and 'The flowers are far from being spectacular, but they compensate by being plentiful, and this plant is seldom out of bloom'. She concludes by saying, 'Easy to propagate, *S. disermis* produces seed in copious amounts that germinate readily. Cuttings can be rooted quite quickly at almost any time during the growing season'. *Salvia disermis* would seem to be a good candidate for inclusion in a mixed border of plants like lavender, which grows several feet tall.



Salvia disermis

Soils and Plants – The Role of Nitrogen (N)

By Charles Hrubos

Nitrogen is an essential plant nutrient. It is an important component in chlorophyll which is essential for photosynthesis. Nitrogen is of course abundant as a gas in the atmosphere (78%). However, in its gaseous form it is not available to plants.

In plants, important nitrogen containing compounds include amino acids, peptides, proteins, DNA, RNA and chlorophyll. Nitrogen is also abundant in the chemical structure of soil microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi.

Nitrogen can be made available to plants in a variety of ways.

- Atmospheric nitrogen can be converted to nitrogen oxides by lightning. (There is also a belief that rainfall itself will accumulate some nitrogen oxides from the air on its way to the ground).
- Top soils contain a high proportion of atmospheric nitrogen (typically 20%). Special nitrogen-fixing bacteria produce an enzyme called nitrogenase which is able to convert the nitrogen gas into ammonia. Phosphorus and trace elements (specifically molybdenum, iron and nickel) need to be present in the soil to act as catalysts for this process. The ammonia that is produced is a plant available form of nitrogen.
- A specialised group of bacteria form a symbiotic relationship with specific plants. The best known of these is the association of Rhizobium bacteria with legumes such as clover, lucerne, soybean, broad beans and peas. These bacteria fix nitrogen in root nodules attached to plant roots to form ammonia. Acacias are also able to fix nitrogen via Rhizobium bacteria.
- Actinorhizal plants form a symbiotic

relationship with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, primarily Frankia, in their root nodules. This symbiotic relationship allows these plants to grow in nitrogen-poor soils and even colonise disturbed or degraded land.

- A very recent discovery by soil scientists is that bacteria can be transported by fungi to enter the root structure of plants, where the plant will strip the bacteria of their nutrient load before excreting bacterial remnants back into the soil. This process is termed the rhizophagy cycle.
- Nitrogen can also be applied to plants via synthetic fertilisers containing ammonium, nitrates, nitrites and urea. (Nitrogen in these forms is quite reactive and mobile in the soil. An alternative application method in some circumstances is to apply nitrogen via a foliar spray (based on urea) rather than soil application).
- Natural organic materials are a very good source of nitrogen. These can include amino acids, manures, composts, compost tea, comfrey tea, vermicast, fish hydrolysates, kelp extracts, fulvic and humic acids etc.

Nitrate metabolises in the leaf. This encourages shoot biomass. This process requires the presence of molybdenum, sulphur and iron. If these micronutrients are absent, nitrate can be retained in the foliage which is an undesirable situation.

An excess of nitrogen in plants can cause them to have weak cells. Weak watery cells are very susceptible to bacteria, viruses and fungal infections. The plant may grow soft new foliage which becomes attractive to pests.

Ammonium metabolises in the roots. This encourages root biomass.

Soil pH is an important factor for nitrogen availability. Nitrogen uptake by plants is optimum in the pH range 6.5-8.0 and falls away outside of this range.

Carbon and nitrogen are the two essential building blocks of terrestrial ecosystems. The carbon-to-nitrogen (C:N) ratio is a measure of the amount of carbon relative to the amount of nitrogen in organic matter. It's a key indicator of how readily organic materials will decompose and release nutrients, particularly nitrogen, for plant use. In nature, the C:N ratio is approximately 30:1 and this achieves an optimum cycling of natural biosystems.

Nitrogen compounds are an important food source for bacteria and soil microorganisms. Bacteria have a C:N ratio of 5:1. Other microorganisms in the soil can have a different C:N ratio. Each must acquire enough carbon and some nitrogen from the soil to maintain that ratio in their cells. Where there is an excess of nitrogen in the soil, bacteria will actively seek out sources of carbon and can begin to deplete reserves of long-term stable carbon that is being held in the soil.

Excess nitrogen in the soil due to excessive synthetic fertilisation can have negative impacts:

- It has the potential to deplete the soil of long-term stable carbon, as described above.
- It suppresses nitrogen fixation (nitrogenase enzyme in the soil declines).
- It can result in leaching out of nitrates into waterways.
- It can be lost to the atmosphere (converted by soil microbes to nitrous oxide greenhouse gas and ammonia).
- If using high-analysis fertilisers, the plant does not need to activate the soil microbiome to bring these nutrients to the plant. Then the plant does not exude sufficient sugars into the soil. This in turn means that the plant is not providing sufficient energy to microbes that are responsible for producing enzymes that make trace elements available (via their mineralisation activity).

Over the course of the last century, there has

been significant deterioration of farmlands around the world caused by poor farming practices. This has been brought about by continual tilling of the soil, mono-cropping, excessive use of inorganic fertilisers, leaving land fallow, and overgrazing.

In the last few decades there has been a new understanding of soil microbiology. This has led to the adoption of improved farming practices frequently referred to as regenerative agriculture. Much of the research effort in the regenerative agriculture space has been directed at broadacre farming for cereal crops and cattle production. My aim is to glean useful information from this research that may be applicable to us as gardeners and then apply it for our benefit.

When considering the role and use of nitrogen by gardeners, the following ideas and recommendations can be made:

- Use inorganic nitrogen fertilisers sparingly.
- Wherever possible, apply mulches and composts to the soil, and consider the use of compost tea, comfrey tea, vermicast, fish hydrolysates, kelp extracts, and fulvic and humic acids.
- To achieve a target C:N ratio of 30:1 in compost, ensure adequate 'green' materials (those high in nitrogen such as food waste and fresh cut grass clippings) are mixed in with 'brown' materials (newspaper, leaves, straw etc).
- Aim to keep soil pH in the range 6.5-8.0.
- Consider the use of foliar sprays if nutrient deficiencies are identified. A useful Australian website that identifies the symptoms of common deficiencies in plants has been made available by the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (agric.wa.gov.au/identifying-nutritional-deficiencies-backyard-plants?page=0%2C2).

Nicky Martin's Garden, Mount Eliza

Text and photos by Heather Lucas

This garden in Mount Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula was a fabulous, large garden, with lots of garden areas, pathways, a beautiful lawn and incredible vistas and views.

On the day, the weather was actually very kind to us, with a high of around 15/16 degrees and light rain/showers at times, but we got our garden tour around the garden without getting soaked or cold. I think that the weather may have affected the turnout of numbers for the day, but the five of us who came were so very grateful and happy that we did. It truly was an amazing garden and Nicky and her husband were the most wonderful hosts, who shared their garden, knowledge of all things plant and garden-wise and also, we all had the most wonderful conversations about their travels, the world and a plethora of other anecdotes.

This garden had the works. Besides the great garden, they had a swimming pool with a gorgeous sandstone surround/pool area, delightful covered pagoda beside the pool, a tennis court, chicken coop/henhouse and run, lots of gravel pathways leading you around the

house and gardens, a dry plant garden area and the healthiest and most productive vegetable garden I have ever seen.

They had lots of different plants and trees in the garden, including a number of salvias, beautiful orange and yellow clivias, native plants and to die for orchids.

There were even some beautiful little concrete angels lying on their tummies, resting their heads on their folded arms in a garden bed on some beautiful rocks. A divine metal structure/ornament of a tree and person on a stone pillar, and three glass ornaments which looked like teardrops or bulb heads in red, yellow and blue. These are the special items that give you a wow moment when you come across them in the garden, very special.

Then, to top it all off, we had the most sumptuous lunch, with Nicky baking two wonderful cakes, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

A huge thank you to Nicky and her husband for letting us come and join them to see their garden and partake in what was truly a glorious day.

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News from The Perennial Poppies Southeast Queensland

Text by Carol Kerkin, photos from the VSSG website

As I step outside into the garden with my morning cuppa, my eyes are drawn to the salvias with their lush leaves and colourful flowers. *Salvia* 'Amistad' and *S.* 'Amante' look stunning side by side with the lengthy tubular purple flowers and their dark calyces contrasting with the tubular cerise/crimson colour of 'Amante'. Further down, *S.* 'Blue Chill', a longispicata x farinacea, has done well this year, and the two-toned sky blue/light purple upright flowers look lovely beside *S.* 'Grammas Lipstick' with its showy flush of petite pink blooms. As I walk further along the row, I see the beautiful blue flowers of *S.* 'Mesa Azure' contrasting with the two aromatic leucanthas – 'Red Harry' and 'Midnight'. The Autumn/Winter bloomers aren't contributing to the colour, but are forgiven because they are getting ready for their next display.

I have been a member of the Salvia Study Group in S.E. Qld and the Perennial Poppies for over 10 years and love going to members' gardens and ambling along their garden paths and admiring the variety, placement and lushness of their plantings. However, my perennials are currently in pots and have moved house with us recently. So, down the side of the house (which has the best aspect on the two-acre block), I have laid pavers in two parallel lines 3 metres apart, and placed uniform-sized pots of salvias on the pavers. Each salvia has a name tag to help me "get to know it". The 15-metre row against the house is more shaded, whilst the other row gets full sun for most of the day.

So long as they are watered once a day on hot, 'over 35 degree' days, they look healthy and happy. If I miss a day, however, they droop. Each container pot has a saucer which is upturned under the container in Winter to avoid water pooling and plants having cold feet. At the start of Spring, I flip over

the saucers to hold the water. The water only lasts for a short while in the saucer before evaporating, but it prevents my soil from becoming hydrophobic and not retaining water – a real problem in the Sub-tropics. The ants seem to have a technique of coating the potting mix with wax and providing a pathway down the side of the pot, which prevents the container from having an even distribution of water, but the saucers are very helpful in preventing this.

So far, we have had 2 weeks of Spring weather, then it felt like Summer had arrived. Forecasters are predicting a long, hot Summer, and towards the end of October this year, we experienced a heat wave with a maximum of close to 40 degrees, followed by severe storms with hail and flooding. The weather certainly challenges us.

The garden I inherited from the previous owners has bougainvilleas, frangipanis, jasmine and hibiscus flowering at the moment, and lots of hedges dividing the garden. I am really excited to have a fairly blank canvas and the opportunity to make a garden with my favourite plants and ideas gleaned from our travels. We have only been at our Dayboro property for just over a year now, and I will be excited to see the plants in the garden eventually. Hopefully, I will have made good use of my time during my morning walks, enjoying my cuppa, admiring the display, and deciding which salvias grow well together and where they should go in the garden.



Salvia 'Amante'



Salvia 'Mystic Spires'

WHAT'S HAPPENING NEXT YEAR

2026

FEBRUARY – SUN 15TH

Garden Visit to Maureen Scoble's no fuss garden – 8 Riverview St, Avondale Heights – 11am

A brilliant no fuss garden with gravel paths and no lawn. So much to see around every corner.

A lovely garden with so much packed into this small garden.

Come and wander with a cup of tea/ coffee, identify all the plants in the garden.

Bring a plate to share for lunch and a chair. Enquiries: Lyndi Garnett Ph 9803 4534.



Magnificent views over the city from the west

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MARCH – SAT 7TH & SUN 8TH

Ferny Creek Collectors and Rare Plant Sale – 100 Hilton Rd, Sassafras – 10am-4pm

Come and see the new season's Salvias. All bright new colours to match and contrast everything growing in your garden.

Match your Salvia colour with your garden. All the colours of the rainbow. A good variety of full sun, frost hardy and shade loving Salvias available. Both editions of the Salvia book is available.

Place your orders early to avoid disappointment. Email your wish list, these can be put aside to be picked up on the day. Bring Salvia flower and plants to be identified.

Email: lgarnett844@gmail.com Phone Lyndi 9803 4534.



CONTACT LYNDI

Email: lgarnett844@gmail.com | Ph (03) 9803 4534

MARCH – SAT 22ND

Garden Visit to Lyn Cannard's Garden – 620 Dickens Rd, Freshwater Creek, Geelong – 11am

Lyn's beautiful cut flower paddock is a must to see, as well as her extensive Dahlia collection, not forgetting her garden full of Salvias and perennials.

If you can tear yourself away, we can go to the nearby Cottage Farm Perennial Nursery for lunch.



MARCH – SAT 22ND

Lunch at Cottage Farm Perennials – 1985 Barrabool Rd, Gnarwarre, Geelong – 1.30pm

Bring a plate to share. Wander around Chris Tournier's nursery and garden.

Enjoy Chris's garden, where you will find so many interesting plants to identify.

Visit her nursery and purchase that special plant you've been wanting.



(continued over...)

Terry Ashton's Garden, Glen Waverley

Text and photos by Heather Lucas

You can never stop a true gardener from visiting gardens even when it is raining; we come out, come rain, hail or sunshine. This garden visit day it was raining and there were people with umbrellas and raincoats with hats on everywhere in Terry's garden, checking it all out. We had around 13 people who came on the day, which is an excellent turnout for a garden visit when it is cold and raining.

The last time I visited Terry's garden was the 17th April, 2011 (14 years ago); my, how time flies, and it was lovely for me to look back at those photos and to see how far the garden has evolved and grown since then.

Terry's garden is a wonderful cottage style garden, with roses, salvias, trees, a vegetable garden and many more perennial plants. I was completely blown away by her many wonderful roses, which were in full bloom in the garden beds, but also over numerous arches and obelisks in her front and back garden. Her front garden has a lovely white picket fence with

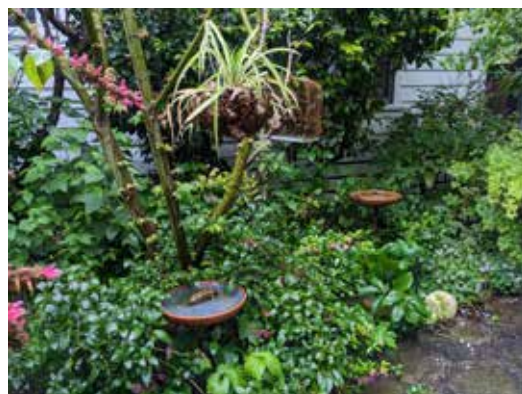
the main entrance having a trellised arch entry way with a path leading down the middle to her beautiful white weatherboard house. There were 3 other arches in the front garden, chock-a-block full of roses and climbing geraniums and garden beds full of plants. Amongst the plants in her garden were the following salvias: *Salvia* 'Joan', *S. karwinskii*, *S. dorisiana*, *S. 'Finn Grove'*, *S. coahuilensis* and *S. 'Timboon'*, to name a few; so many beautiful roses (couldn't name them all); geraniums; many different types of bulbs, amongst them a beautiful salmon-coloured gladioli and lots of other perennial plants.

There were many beautiful birdbaths, ponds, a lemon tree and a lovely seated area in the back garden.

Then of course to top it all off our wonderful selection of dishes brought along for lunch to share – sandwiches, pies and cakes – yum, yum.

Wonderful garden, wonderful lunch and wonderful people and conversations, with shared love of all things plant and garden based.

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Can You Tell The Difference?

Text and photos by Lyndi Garnett

These three *Salvias* all look the same, wouldn't you say? But, each one is different, coming from different areas at different times. It goes to show that the same looking flower can pop up at anytime, anywhere, depending on what is growing in the garden nearby.

'Candleglow' is a *Salvia* that many will know, having been around for a while, coming down from Queensland, I think. This has long, oblong leaves, generally with a rounded apex; its leaves are a matt, pale green with veins easily seen, growing 60-80cmH, early to begin flowering, and seems always to be in flower – a very striking plant.

'Appleblossom' was found in my garden a couple of years ago, near 'Candleglow', so I can compare. A smaller, more compact shrub with matt, mid-green lanceolate leaves with a pointed apex. Growing 40-60cmH, it is slower to come into flower, but remains in flower for a very long time over Summer and Autumn.

'Shannon' was given to David Glen of Lambley Nursery by a friend, growing in a regional area. Although very new to our collection and we are still trialling the growth habits, it looks to be a small compact shrub with semi-glossy, apple-green, lanceolate leaves that can have slightly undulating edges and a slightly pointed apex. Growing 40-60cm H, it seems to be a prolific flowerer, flowering throughout summer and autumn.

All have the same lovely cream bottom lobes and hood with pink hairs, a pink tube and a coloured green calyx which becomes darker in full sunlight and age of the flowerhead. All like to grow in full sun, tough and hardy for summer and winter. They should tolerate a light frost. Mulching and having other small shrubs growing around them will help to keep them warm and reduce the effects of adverse weather conditions.

Unfortunately, the difference is in the details and the ability to observe your plants. Of course, picking little vases of flowers will also show these differences.



Salvia 'Candleglow'



Salvia 'Appleblossom'



Salvia 'Shannon'

The Victorian Salvia Study Group. Inc

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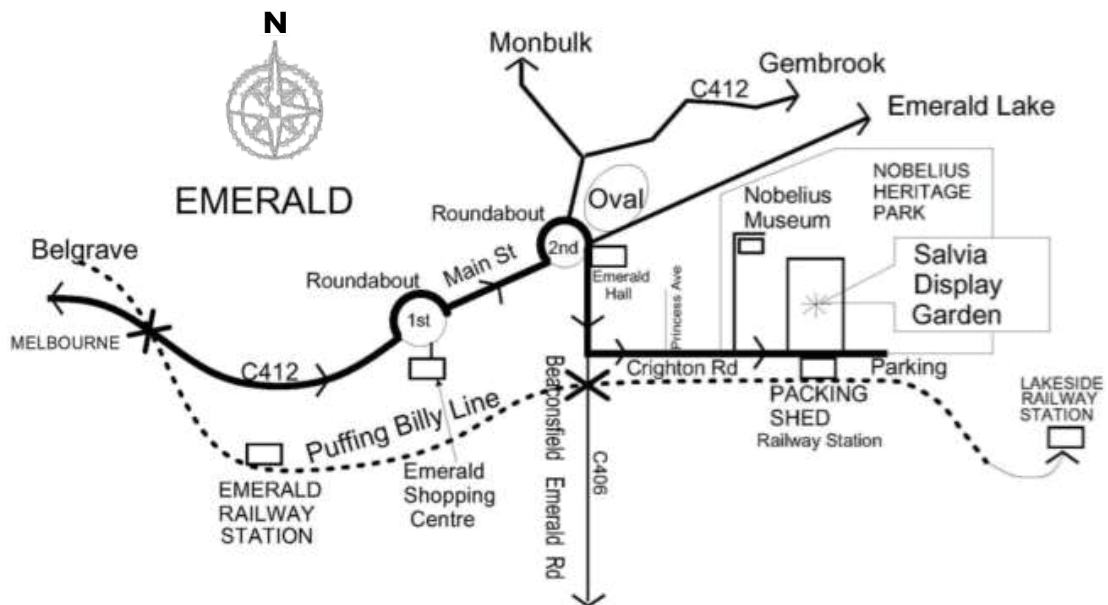
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DIRECTIONS TO THE SALVIA DISPLAY GARDEN



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