

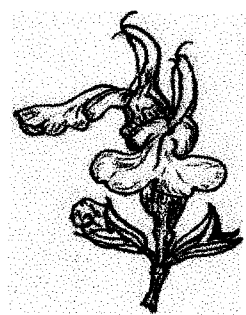
No 13

SalviaNews

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

June/July /August 2003

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Winter in a salvia garden is to be stunned by riotous colour. In spite of continuing drought and gales here I was amazed to see my garden looking so good on my return from The Illawarra. Maureen Cox is just one of the interesting people I met at The 23rd Illawarra Garden School and has written about her lovely garden in this News. Welcome Maureen and all the other new members. Please write soon and tell us about your garden.

Dates For Your Diary

Sunday August 17th

Meet at the Herb Garden in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens at 11 am. We will look at a variety of salvias and herbs including many with a medicinal and culinary nature. Renee, the curator of the Herb Garden will be our guide. Bring a picnic lunch to have on the lawn, everyone welcome.

September 20th and 21th Rare Plant Sale at Macedon

Wednesday September 24th Meet at Lambley Nursery, 'Burnside' at 11am. Lesters Rd. Ascot (near Ballarat) Melways 527 B3
David Glenn hopes to be present. Ph. 534 34 303 Plants for sale
Everyone welcome and bring a picnic lunch, note: this is on a Wednesday.
Anyone needing transport should ring Jillian Barkell 03 97566361

Sunday October 19th Country Farm Perennials Wensley Farm Laings Road, Nayook. Melways 528 A5 Vic Roads Country Directory 80 H8

This will be an interesting day and everyone is welcome.
Bring your own picnic lunch: hot drinks provided.
The nursery will be specially opened for us to see the plants and make purchases.
We will all meet at the nursery at 11am.
Anyone requiring transport should ring Jillian Barkell 03 97566361

Write This Date In Your Diary

SALVIA SPECTACULAR April 3 & 4. 2004. at Ferny Creek.

Propagation workshops will be held at Trudi's garden in Selby if enough people are interested. For those folk who haven't attended propagation days, we are willing to have small groups come and be given individual attention.

Report from The Illawarra

I am growing Salvias almost on the beach at Warri Beach Gerringong N.S.W. My interest in Salvias began several years ago when a good friend and member of our Garden Club, introduced me to them. She has since moved to another clime but there are bits of her Salvias all over the area.

I particularly like the way they blend in and poke out from behind other plants in my sort of cottage garden. They have to put up with salty winds throughout the summer and, of course, a sandy soil which has a lot of mulch and compost continually added. All of them survived the big dry but some did need attention eg. *Salvia purpurea* and *S. Costa Rican Blue*. I am on town water but we have installed three water tanks for the garden (which weren't much good until we got some rain). I am sorry if you haven't had decent rain because we have had 30 odd inches since the drought broke here.

At the moment I have *Salvia madrensis* flowering and being visited by the little honeyeaters as is *S. purpurea* and *S. elegans purple*. I have placed *S. madrensis* in a few places around the garden as I like the way the yellow flowers complement other plants. One has a *S. Costa Rican Blue* behind it which looks effective. Two *Salvia involucrata*, *bethelii* and *xkarwinskii*, are in bloom and the birds love them as well. One of my favourites is *S. Waverly* which never seems to be without a flower or two.

In March this year I ordered a few 'reds' as I seemed to have plenty of blues and pinks. *Salvia disjuncta*, *S. regla* and *S. holwayii* are starting to spread and I have had flowers on all of them. They were a bit slow at first as we hadn't had a lot of rain at that stage.

I also ordered a few 'mauves' inc. *S. purpurea* and *S. melissadora*. The latter took off as soon as it was planted and has flowered ever since. I read that it was good to plant near Lemon Verbena as it complemented the small flowers of the verbena. I also put in some lime iris which I hope will look lovely come spring/summer.

Salvia africana-lutea is a bit out of control but I love it's unusual colouring. Not sure what to plant around it though to complement that rusty shade. Any ideas? I have lost a couple of plants mainly my own fault because of incorrect placing; notably *S. van houtii* and a couple of smaller ones that got lost amongst the shrubbery and were never seen again. I am very careful to mark the deciduous varieties so that I don't forget about them.

Today I have dug out a new bed to plant some more Salvias and other perennials. The space had been taken up by two large yuccas which were spiking me every time I walked by. I am also planning to remove a couple of Hibiscus and replacing them with Salvias.

I do prune my salvias as I have a lot of other plants and I like to mix them. Many don't grow as madly as they might in heavier soil so I don't have the problem of them getting out of control. I love the fact that many are flowering now in the middle of winter (so far very mild), that they are not fussy plants, that they survive drought and salt and that they provide such beautiful colour and interest in the garden.

Maureen Cox.

Seedlings in S E Queensland

On a recent visit to a group of gardens in the South Burnett (Nanango/Kingaroy area) Debbie Follett and I viewed a number of seedlings in the garden of Althea Drew. The most impressive was a seedling from *Salvia darcy* – the same vibrant flower but with a leaf much more like a *S. microphylla* on a very strong, thick plant – definitely more robust than *S. darcy* and a mass of flowers at this time of year. We feel this is a far superior plant and intend to chart its progress. Can we call it 'Althea Drew'?

Other interesting seedlings were, we suspect, crosses from *Salvia greggii* and *Salvia microphylla*, and included a very pale pink. Some *S. greggii*s are rather fragile for us and we intend to trial the more interesting seedlings to see if they perform better in our climate. The three most reliable known species are *S. jamensis* 'Sierra Pink', *S. greggii* 'Alba' and *S. greggii* 'Raspberry Royal'. *Continued over page*

NOTES FROM GRUYERE June 2003

The cooler weather has brought about great changes to the garden where salvias have begun flowering in great profusion. The long branches of *S. involucrata* are weighted down, not so much by the flowering stems but by the beautiful crimson rosellas who take flight as you approach. The flash of blue on their wings add a lovely contrast to the deep pink flowers. Birds can bring great joy to the gardens, not only during the winter months but throughout the year and Crimson Rosellas are not the only birds amongst the salvias. There are bush wrens, thornbills, blackbirds, a variety of honeyeaters including the Eastern Spinebills that never seem to leave the garden, especially now there are salvias growing in the native garden areas. While I love to see such a variety of birdlife, there is a great problem with Wattle Birds, these I feel are real thuggish 'boy birds' who really dominate the scene and smash their way through the salvias. It is a sad sight to see the glorious *Salvia Costa Rican Blue's* full crowning glory reduced to broken stems with a few odd remaining flowers. Although, there is a lovely patch of *S. Costa Rican Blue* left untouched (so far) by the Wattle Birds, it looks stunning beside *S. rubescens*, *S. cacaliaefolia* and the blue-grey ferny leaves of rue *Ruta graveolens*, the silver-white of *Senecio cineraria* adds another contrast to colour and leaf formation.

It has been quite interesting to see the varieties of *Salvia involucrata* coming into bloom at the moment; these plants all have the same involucrata type flowering head as the species *S. involucrata* but they vary quite a bit in size and colour. These examples are *S. involucrata* 'Pink Icicles', 'Hadspen', 'Joan' and 'Bethellii', another species also with the large head of flowers and thick budgroup on the tip is *Salvia wagneriana* and in full bloom, so too is the delightful pale pink form.

All of my autumn / winter salvias are flowering even new species like *Salvia holwayi* which is dainty and has small red tubed flowers, similar to *S. elegans* Honeymelon.

An item of interest in late May was the visit of two ladies from New Zealand.

Anne Nicholls of the Salvia Society in N.Z. and her friend Val Flint were over here for a holiday. I met Anne on my visit a few autumns ago, to see the Salvias in Auckland Region Botanic Gardens which is home to an excellent Salvia Collection.

They were chauffeured from their hotel in Melbourne to Gruyere and the hills to spend a busy day visiting gardens and viewing our Salvia collections. A welcome lunch followed a long walk amongst the salvias here in Gruyere then it was on to Jillian Barkell at The Patch to see how salvias performed in the shade of trees, we then travelled up to Selby for afternoon tea with Trudi Fry and were joined by Jillian and Elly Roos. An interesting afternoon walk around Trudi's garden brought the visit to a close, then Anne and Val were chauffeured back to their hotel.

They were delighted to see a few salvias quite new and unknown in New Zealand, even the Eastern Spinebill honeyeaters put on a treat for the visitors who watched them sipping nectar and chasing each other throughout the salvias, and to cap it off, a couple of Kookaburras gave them a good laugh.

I hope Ann and Val had an enjoyable stay in Melbourne... I certainly enjoyed their company.

Mez Beniley

The 23rd Annual Illawarra Garden School

I was invited to speak on Salvias and Survival. I remember that I opened my talk by saying that it was survival of the gardener as well as the garden and the salvias that I was interested in. Other than that it is rather a blur. Sheila said that as far as she could remember I paid no attention to my notes. Well, guess I didn't, because I was so overcome by my pictures projected up on the big screen in the lecture theatre at Wollongong University, I just talked about them and salvias in my garden. The pictures were a steep learning curve for me. First of all I learnt how to use my son-in-law's digital camera and next learnt to 'burn to disc'. This disc was the one I handed to the projectionist.

I had taken pictures at intervals from 2.3.03 to when I left to stay with Sheila and Anne in late June so there were dry sticks of salvia and then leaves and then glorious flowers to see as they appeared after such a small amount of rain. The standard of the pictures on the big screen was terrific; not a pixel to be seen also terrific was the Garden School. This is a combined event of many garden clubs in the area working together to create a great learning experience. A display of salvias, grown in the area was arranged by the members. It was great to receive such an enthusiastic welcome and I felt such a genuine interest in salvias after my talk. Trudi Fry

Pat's Potty Experiments Part II

I've had a good run since the last newsletter. I believe I've kept all my babies alive. *Salvia przewalskii* disappeared about a month ago but I was relieved to read that this one is winter dormant. I have two pots which both died down simultaneously so I'm hoping they were both taking early retirement for the winter. Incidentally, I have a similar *Salvia* which I obtained from a friend's garden at Cobram. This has a basal rosette of leaves and was flowering in her garden last December, with lovely mauve spikes. This one hasn't died down so I wonder what it can be? It self seeded readily in Cobram but then plants respond differently in different conditions. My *S. coccinea* 'Lady in Red' self seeds occasionally and I am pleased about this. However, other friends in Leeton (NSW) regard it as a weed because it is so fecund!

Back to my pots.

First of all, I've done a few growing trials with various commercial potting mixes - not specifically with *Salvias* - in fact with pansies and lettuces - mainly to test their properties (value for money) without the addition of any fertilisers. The results were interesting and I only wish I had trialled more brands. Because it wasn't a comprehensive trial, it would be unfair to recommend any one particular mix. Suffice it to say that "Grow Better" Regular, in spite of not having slow release fertiliser in it like the Premium mixes have, did very well over seven weeks, with both pansies and lettuces. I believe this one was given a good rap by Choice Magazine and I've noticed that a lot of nurseries are selling this one now, where they used to have piles of Debco Terra Cotta and Tub mix. This latter one, of course, is a Premium mix, which generally means it has the addition of slow release fertiliser and a wetting agent, but it comes at twice the price too. Gillian Barkell is very happy with the Hortico General Purpose mix, which is often on special in supermarkets. This seems to be fairly well draining and moisture retentive, whereas the cheapest mix available in Safeways certainly needs heavy additions of fertiliser for flowers or leafy vegetables to grow and it tends to slump a bit and be less well drained. Spotswood, in Yarra Glen sells a pretty good general mix by the trailer load. A 6 x 4 trailer (0.7 cu m) costs \$77, which is MUCH cheaper than buying it by the bag. This mix performed well with pansies but it lacked the necessary goodies for fast growth of leafy vegies.

So, to my *salvias*. *Salvia patens* has to be my favourite I think and yet I have lost this every winter to date. My first two were in the ground. Now I know the snails can demolish the tender new growth in Spring, but I think the tubers can easily rot in badly drained, shady, soggy earth. I'm sure that was my problem. I had the same experience with pots on my back veranda which is very shaded and damp in winter. So, this year, I have grown a box full of *patens* from seed, thanks to Lyndy's excellent supply, and these are now a healthy size. In April, I transplanted these into a range of mixes (3 per mix). Unfortunately, I couldn't find any perlite when I wanted it so I substituted vermiculite, which won't be quite the same. So, for better or worse, this is what I have done to achieve a range of free draining and water retaining outcomes:

plain P mix:

3 parts p mix: 1 part scoria
3 parts p mix: 1 part vermiculite
3 parts p mix: 1 part scoria: 1 part peat moss
3 parts p mix: 1 part vermiculite: 1 part peat moss
and I shall try lifting a couple of separate ones

Raising salvias from seed:

Most sources specify 15 - 20°C as the minimum soil temperature for germination, while others indicate that light is also necessary. I believe that any light requirement might be species specific, although this assertion is based on tests I conducted indoors in late autumn last year, when the day length was somewhat reduced and some of the seed I had collected had not had sufficient after ripening time.

From 10 species, I found that 6 species germinated in total darkness, although not necessarily well, compared to only 5 species in 'normal' light (seeds covered with vermiculite in punnets of seed raising mix, placed in the window) and 9 species with supplementary light (ie as before but with additional light overnight). The ones that coped comparatively well in the dark were *Salvia patens*, *chamaedryoides*, *chiapensis* and *coccinea bicolor*.

Continued over page

Salvia viridis showed a nice demonstration of the need for adequate after ripening (or for dormancy to be broken by stratification). Out of three punnets of 20 seeds each (seeds freshly collected that autumn), only 2 had germinated after 22 days in 'normal' light. However, I had placed some additional punnets in the fridge, covered with plastic bags to prevent drying. After, 2 weeks in the fridge, 16 seeds germinated, and another 14 germinated from punnets left in the fridge for 5 weeks. By this time, the day length was so short that I gave up.

None of this is very conclusive but there is plenty of scope for discovery I feel.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, aren't the winter flowering salvias wonderful? I've got *S. involucrata* 'Pink Icicles' for the first time. I love this one, as well as the *S. iodantha* and *S. purpurea* that are doing well. *S. elegans purple* must be 3 or 4 metres high and only in bud! *Salvia* Anthony Parker is looking wonderful in a pot. I hope this doesn't turn into a monster. The other ones in bud are my *S. karwinskii* and *S. karwinskii* crosses. This year I hope to be able to sort out which ones I really have, then perhaps I'll come to grips with my greggiis and microphyllas next summer!

Pat Anderson

Salvia michoacan

Hands up all those *Salvia* enthusiasts who possess *Salvia michoacan*? Its pronunciation bothers me, is it "mi" as in "my", "choa" as in "lower", "can" as in "can", and separated into these three consonants thus? Since purchasing it about three years ago, it has given me a very interesting and lively time.

Soon after purchase the large clump containing it produced small pink-flowered daisies. I removed these in my search for the tuberous roots of the supposed *salvia* beneath. Having found them, I planted it out in my garden. After some months it began to lose interest in living, so I transferred it back to a pot. Later still I found the lovely blue flowers of *S. guaranitica* in full bloom in the pot alongside my errant treasure. Once again I emptied the pot to search for those tuberous roots of *S. michoacan*, removed those of *S. guaranitica*, and returned the former to its pot.

My patience was rewarded when during the first week of May it finally produced two smallish flowers on one stem. They were royal blue with the lower lips 8mm long, very lobed and bearing 2 white stripes. The upper lips were only 4mm long and didn't really open. In less than two weeks they had fallen leaving small cup-shaped bracts. Another flower stem shows promise of one or more flowers yet to come. The plant has a height of about 55cms.

Bill Whitehead

Reports on 'MYCOWARCAN'

This is a challenging *salvia* for a collector and I too have had interesting times Bill, including the 'it is dead experience', and then finding lively shoots speeding out of the bottom of the pot and no sign of life at the top. However this year two splendid clumps in the garden, in spite of the drought, put forth stunning spikes with whorls of royal blue flowers. Its glory was short however. For me it just doesn't seem to flower for long or repeat flower.

Trudi Fry

For anyone who saw Trudi's *Salvia michoacan* in full flower would have to say that it was well worth the wait and the concern of thinking it had died the previous winter. The bright royal blue flowers with a touch of white at the throat looked stunning but yes, it does seem to have a short a flowering period. My *S. michoacan* flowered beautifully in its first year (not nearly as good as Trudi's), then it died down for winter but never produced much growth the following spring. I replanted it in a more favourable position with morning sun, a little more protection from the summer heat and wind and mixed compost into the soil. As for the name, it can be called 'mi-cho-a-can' or 'my-co-a-can'. Meg Bentley

The Herb Society of South Australia Incorporated.
Post Office Box 140, Fullarton, South Australia 5063

The South Australian Salvia Study Group Report

We have read with great interest about our fellow salvia enthusiasts around Australia. Your Salvia News is a great way for people to exchange information and ideas about salvias here in Australia.

In regard to some items that were mentioned in the previous Salvia News. The salvia 'Margaret Arnold' or Margaret's Rose has seemed to cause a problem. It was originally found in the garden of Margaret Arnold as a chance seedling. It most likely is a cross between *Salvia microphylla* 'Cyclamen' and *Salvia 'Huntington's Red'* as these two were growing in close proximity to each other. Margaret gave a plant to Simon Ardill who began propagating and selling it at the local market. He needed a name to call it so he called it *Salvia 'Margaret Rose'*. Sue Templeton suggested to Margaret that it should be called after her, otherwise someone could lay claim to the salvia and rename it anything they like. Margaret prefers the salvia to be known as 'Margaret Arnold' so this is what it should be referred to officially!

I recently purchased the salvia 'San Carlos Festival' that was mentioned in the last newsletter. I found it at our local Bunning's store. It retails for \$7.95 but I was fortunate to pick one up on the markdown trolley for \$3.00. All it needed was a drink of water! I repotted it and looked after it over our long hot summer. I have just planted it in the garden a few weeks ago and it is doing just fine. The label reads in part: "*Salvia microphylla* 'San Carlos Festival' Height 60cm, spread to 1 m A floriferous, compact and dry tolerant shrub which produces vibrant fuschia (their spelling) pink, tinted scarlet coloured flowers from late spring through to summer. An ideal selection for water-wise gardens tolerating dry conditions well. Suited to full sun locations in most soil types provided they are well drained." Mine is still flowering but is only 40cm high at this stage. I think it should grow very much like the other *microphylla* species that I have.

On 27th April our Salvia Study Group had an Autumn Salvia Show at "Woodhouse" in the Adelaide Hills. It proved to be a great success. Although not as hectic as our spring show, it none the less was popular with the general public. Many are commenting on the difficulty in purchasing salvias at the local nurseries. We seem to be the only good source of salvias in Adelaide at this time. Several people have commented on how well salvias have grown in their gardens and are now adding to their collections. They are amazed at the colours of the flowers and the great diversity that exists among the various salvia species.

In response to the every increasing questions on growing and maintaining salvias, our group has just published a small handbook that we now sell to those who are interested. It proved to be a major interest at the show. We were able to sell quite a number of copies and we have just had to get some more printed off. There is not often enough time at these shows to talk with people about salvias and the booklet enables us to pass on information much more easily. We may in future hold an information/workshop day on salvias that the general public can attend and learn more about salvias and how to grow them.

Our next major task is to get more of our group propagating salvias to sell. We currently rely too heavily on one or two major growers for our sale plants and we really need more involved.

We still require much more rain here in South Australia. Hopefully this will come in the not too distant future otherwise we may be facing water restrictions like much of the rest of the country.

Best wishes from South Australia!

Anthony Medcalf

A Guide to Growing Salvias in Southern Australia

A booklet priced at only \$2 has been produced by the South Australia Salvia Study Group. It contains a list of salvias and much useful information. We have it for sale. Phone Ray on 9754 4889 or Trudi on 9754 4041. We will bring copies to meetings and workshops too.

News Flash !! Salvias in The Vineyard

Salvias planted last Christmas at Renmark (grown in clay soil and watered regularly) look wonderful against chardonnay vines, *Salvia 'Purple Majesty'*, *S. involucreta* 'Joan', and *S. mexicana* 'Limelight' flowering in late autumn are a picture.

Jillian Barkell

Sages on Sages (or *Salvias* as writ by the Ancient Herbalists)

When the Herb Society of Victoria was asked by the OPCA to select a genus for an official collection *salvias* were the official choice. So many of the genus have in the past, as well as in the present, a great variety of practical uses. This, after all, is the basic description of a herb.... A plant which throughout the ages, has been used by man for his pleasure, health and wellbeing.

In this article I am quoting from some of the ancient herbalists who had some pithy comments to make concerning the importance of *salvias* (sages) in their day and age.

John Evelyn in his *Acetaria, a Discourse of Sallets*, 1699, says 'tis a plant endu'd with so many and wonderful properties as that the assiduous use of it is said to render man immortal' (toss a few more sage leaves in my salad please!)

In 'A Handful of Pleasant Delites', Clement Robinson quotes "Sage is for sustenance, that should man's life sustaine".

The noted herbalist, Gerard, who grew 972 herbs in his remarkable garden, chose sage as one of his favourites. "No man can doubt the wholesomeness of sage—sage ale quickens the memory and senses, good for the head and the brain.

Centuries before Gerard, Macer produced his herbal. This herbal was a Medieval Latin poem believed to have been written in the 10th century. Many translations of this Herbal have been made over the centuries, many of them prepared as rhyming treatises. This old proverb concerning sage is a translation from Macers Herbal

Why of seeknesse deyethe man
Who'll sawge(sage) in a garden he may have

Today we know this proverb better as 'How can a man die who has sage in his garden?'

The last of the great English Herbalists was John Parkinson, perhaps best known for his famous 'Paradisus'. He was born in 1567, but his most prolific work, 'Theatrum Botanicum', which took many years and much research to write, was completed in his 73rd year. In this work 3,600 plants are described. Of sage, he writes, 'sage is of excellent good use to help the memory, by warming and quickening the senses'.

Nicholas Culpepper (1616-1654) was the English authority on hundreds of herbs. For centuries his advice was followed by all classes of society and herbs used for a multitude of illnesses and 'conditions'. Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) he describes as a 'shrubby plant found in every garden, and is well known to have long, rough, wrinkled leaves, sometimes of a reddish purple colour, of a pretty strong smell'. Along with an extensive list of cures involving the use of sage he writes 'sage taken with wormwood is good for the bloody flux. It also helps the memory, warming and quickening the senses; and the conserve made of the flowers is used for the same purpose. The juice if drunk with vinegar, is good for the plague. In his notes on *Salvia sclarea* Culpepper states' the seeds put in the eyes, clears them from motes and suchlike things gotten within the lids to offend them.

In a more practical vein Culpepper discusses the virtues of 'Wild Clary (*Salvia horminum*) and recommends that the distilled water should be used to cleanse the eyes of redness, waterishness and heat. But he also says 'the seeds of it beaten to a powder and drunk with wine is an admirable help to provoke lust. In his chapter on Small Sage or the Sage of Virtue (*Salvia minor virtutis*) he describes the infusion of leaves as 'operating powerfully by sweat and urine to remove female obstructions'. He also states that the expressed juice, drunk for a considerable time is excellent against rheumatic pains'.

Wonderful old Culpepper! But does anyone know where to obtain *Salvia minor virtutis*? My rheumaticy knees urgently need a dose of the expressed juice!

Ray Boatman

Note from the editor. Don't try any of these old remedies yourselves please children. Remember these folk are all dead!!!

Transplanting Time at Lemon Tree Cottage

Yes it is winter. Clean up time. And with that comes the moving of many plants and shrubs. After 'The Open Garden' in March, I immediately transplanted 4 rhododendrons from the native plants area and moved them up along the neighbour's fence line, with buds all intact. I have no fear in finding them a new home. Three, 5 foot high camellias received the same treatment and now are happy in various other parts of the garden. Transplanting is always followed by a good watering in. The weather has been superb for winter but we desperately need rain. Leon watches the barometer daily and it shows clear all the time. My neighbour reassures me that it will all come in spring. Hope so.

The garden in front of the lounge window has been extended, Salvia 'Harmony' has been moved from the back garden to the front as well as a few *S. greggii* and *S. microphylla* 'Musk'. I love hedging with salvias so I pulled out the *S. scabra* from the vegetable garden area, and planted them to edge the new garden bed. A garden seat now sits in the flower bed adding another feature to the front area.

Five hydrangeas were moved to the back to provide more room for salvias. Salvia 'Anthony Parker', *S. mexicana* 'Lolly Jackson', *S. 'Black Knight'*, *S. 'Purple Majesty'*, *S. Chiquita Blue* were all placed between the standard white 'Iceberg' roses. Have you seen the burgundy 'Iceberg'? The picture looks great. I've already put some in the garden.

Sadly I have removed and mulched the *S. gesneriifloras*. They got too big where they were and I wanted to fill my red, yellow and purple area with smaller salvias. I have used *S. regla*, *S. oppositiflora*, *S. nemorosa* 'East Friesland', *S. cacaliifolia*, *S. microphylla neurepia*, *S. 'Omaha Gold'*, and *S. 'Blue Ribbons'*, *Salvia dombeyii* I've trailed up the Abutilon, and the rest of the space has been planted with *S. greggii* 'Tangerine', *S. coccinea* red, *S. chiapsis*, *S. miniata*, and *S. 'Red Dragon'*.

This garden bed has changed completely since the 'Open Garden'. I'm looking forward to spring to see how the planting works visually. Otherwise I'll change it again next year.

Abutilons, camellias, azaleas and hellebores are all providing colour and contrast with the winter flowering salvias. They are a magnificent sight. Both salvia karvinskii 'Romantic Rose', and *S. involucrata* tall form have a flower bracts measuring at least 12 inches. Salvia karvinskii 'Winter Red' is superb too. An eye catching mass of iridescent purple/blue flowers on *S. 'Agnes'* and *S. lavanduloides* can be seen from the kitchen door. Salvia iodantha was a picture but I hacked it back and moved it again, beside the fence this time, because it was too tall near the veranda. It will be replaced with *S. 'Kathe'*.

Salvias adapt so well to being moved and don't bear any grudge against the gardener. Sometimes getting the right blend of heights and colours takes a few seasons of transplanting. That is the fun of gardening. It is an ever changing experience watching and waiting to see how the bulbs, for instance, will look with their new companions. It is so exciting I can hardly wait.

Elly Roos

Reminder

To all those who have not yet renewed their subscription, a form was included with the last Salvia News, it is now due and Elly is waiting to hear from you.

SE Queensland Salvia News - 1/6/03 from Carol Kerkin

Here in Queensland's Gold Coast hinterland we are daring to hope that the drought conditions of the past 3 or 4 years are finally breaking. The rain on the roof as I type this is certainly my kind of background music.

We are on acreage on the northern edge of the Gold Coast, about 100 metres above sea level. We are not frost prone and until Christmas 2002, when we put in a dam, relied only on tank water.

We first became interested in salvias about 4 years ago and like many other salvia novices were utterly amazed, at not just the number of different salvias, but at the huge diversity of the plant family. Since then it has become a bit of an obsession. At the moment we have about 70 varieties in our garden but there are 30 or so others that we have tried unsuccessfully - not that we won't be tempted to try again!

One of my favourites is one of our originals - *Salvia discolor*. The deep navy flowers against the silver foliage is simply stunning. I just hope that now that we are getting all this lovely rain they don't decide to pack it in. One of them is looking decidedly sulky. *S. leucantha* and *S. leucantha alba* are absolutely musts for any garden simply for the fact that they seem to be in flower for 11 months of the year. The same can be said for *S. Black Knight*. John has always claimed *S. Waverly* to be his all-time number one favourite but I think it has now been pushed from its pedestal by *S. Phyllis Fancy*. It was only planted last August but from about November through to May was just an absolute mass of flowers. *S. Anthony Parker* went in about the same time and has performed equally as well. It was a bit of a waiting game where the flowers were concerned. It was just covered in all these buds and almost every day I would go to inspect them thinking to myself 'please let there be more to the flowers than this'. It was certainly worth the wait!

Over the last 6 or 8 weeks we have had a wonderful display from both the *Salvia wagnerianas* and the *S. involucreatas* and although they are almost finished we have *S. dorisiana* and *S. karwinskii* to look forward to. And what can I say about *S. madrensis*? We thought we may have done the wrong thing as having reached almost 3 metres we cut them back really hard in early March. But they came back wonderfully and we can look forward to a couple more months worth of flowering yet.

With Mother Nature being very kind in the liquid sunshine department and us now having water at the turn of a tap we are entering a new learning curve. Either we will have an abundance of lush growth or we will kill them with over-watering! Keep you fingers crossed for us.

Carol Kerkin
Member of The Perennial Poppies Group

Comment from Barb Wickes:

By pruning at different times one can achieve a range of flowering times. Several of us in SEQ feel that the winter flowers need to be pruned in January or early February to avoid long lanky stems that fall over in a good wind! I have also noticed variances in flowering with areas - my *S. involucreatas* *S.* and *S. wagnerianas* are flowering much later than those at the Kerkins.

The salvia study group that is part of The Perennial Poppies Group has recently met and found that together we have well over 120 species. We will be documenting the growth, flowering etc more diligently in the future to pass on to others.

Another plant obtained by Althea from Dean Feldman near Toowoomba is said to be a cross between *Salvia chamaedryoides* and *S. grahami* purple. I have recently planted it and will follow its progress with interest.

In May our salvia group gathered at Carol & John Kerkin's garden at Kingsholme. They have a seedling that come up alongside *S. involucrata* 'Pink Icicles' with a much brighter pink flower but not as dark as *S. involucrata*. I had this occur a couple of years ago however the plant died after about a year. It will be interesting to see how this one goes. It has the same growth habit as *S. 'Pink Icicles'*.

I feel we need to be very selective when deciding what seedlings are worthy of putting in the market place. There is so much confusion now with plants being put out by wholesale nurseries without their full botanical name. I'd be pleased to hear of experiences from other salvia enthusiasts.

Barb Wickes

Soils and Salvia

All right so you have chosen to focus on the genus *Salvia*. These plants mostly grow very well in the climates of SE Australia. Their forms are amazingly variable, some species are "useful" and their flowering is most generous. So is that really enough to choose *Salvia*: sure thing in my view.

We know that *Salvia* mostly grow very well which leads to one issue: substantial pruning of the plants right through the year. People handle those prunings in a variety of ways so which one is the best? Best for whom or what? Best for the *Salvia* you suggest but I wish to go a bit further than that. We should handle those prunings to improve the performance of our soil. This will improve the growth of our *Salvia* and probably keep them healthier.

Sometimes people will spread their prunings as a coarse mulch. Other gardeners will use a mulcher machine then spread the material as a fine mulch. If asked, in both cases people will say that the material will break down so the method must be all right. Yes, it will break down in time but one very important nutrient is lost using a mulching technique. Nearly all plant nutrients will become available to plants because their breakdown products are solids. Unfortunately the breakdown products of the major nutrient NITROGEN are volatile. They may be lost as oxides of nitrogen or as ammonia. In a mulching method nitrogen will be lost and nitrogen will be drawn out of the soil for the composting process. My suggestions will avoid "drawdown" of nitrogen, rather nitrogen will become available to plants in the compost.

I suggest that you put most of your *Salvia* prunings (and other prunings) through the following compost making process. Make two or three compost bins each about 1m by 1m in area. It can be effective to have fixed sides and removable front panels. Fencing plinth board (150mm by 25mm) is effective. Use a shredder to break up the prunings so that the surface area is large. This will speed the composting. We use an electric shredder and it just loves long *Salvia* stems. We regularly put 3m lengths of stems through: not even a burp. You can mix more woody material to utilise the high nitrogen (N) levels in the *Salvia* material. Even the stems have some N because they are green.

Process your prunings the same day if possible: this will give the best quality of starting material in the compost heap including good moisture level. Generally the heap should be covered to insulate it and to retain moisture. Since there are optimum levels of nutrients in the heap, break down can occur without delay from N shortage.

Do not worry if you only get a thin layer of material into your bin on the first day: cover this and hopefully add more quickly. A deep well-insulated bin will get hot in the middle. N from the prunings will be trapped in the heap and used by bacteria and fungi in the decomposition. When you use the mulch later, N will become available for plant growth. Turn the compost heap maybe as often as every four days: this will bring new material in to the centre to be decomposed and sterilized.

When the compost has broken down and stabilised it can be spread around. While providing the full range of nutrients including N the compost will improve the soil for plant growth. If you have sandy soil the compost will provide nutrients (which you will have to supply regularly) and will hold water in the soil profile. If you have heavy clay soil the compost will cause the goeey clay to clump. This provides air spaces which water will use also. Remember that compost is not a miracle cure. It may take several years of applications. Gypsum is also appropriate.

Graham Ellis