

SalviaNews

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

June/July/August 2004

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This is being written in the WA office of Salvia News. Well, OK, temporary office, and not a salvia in sight, until on my walk this morning in Lesmurdie, I saw *Salvia leucantha*. My daughter and family have a home among the grass trees (*xanthoroea preissei*) in the Perth Hills and the boys ride bikes to school. The weather is great and my holiday perfect... A lot of interesting questions have been asked in this issue and next issue will have ANSWERS!!

CALENDER OF EVENTS

June Sunday 20th Field day at Nobelius Salvia Garden Emerald

Nobelius Park
Off Creighton Rd
Emerald MEL. 127 G4 Time 11.30 am

A chance to see all those plants you saw at the Spectacular growing in a garden

A chance to swap plants---- A chance to help with planting
Bring a plate and drink to share

August Sunday 22nd Visit John & Jenny de Graaf's garden.

10 Doonaha Rd Cockatoo phone 59688507 Mel 188 K8

See a lovely hillside self-sufficient garden—ducks and plants and a lot more

Bring a plate to share 11.30 am

August Wednesday 18th Trudi Fry will speak about salvias

At Gwen Webb Hall 116 Market St. Sale Time 8pm Enquiries Sale Garden Club
There will be salvias for sale Jane Lee 514 58276

September 18th & 19th Rare plant Fair Mt Macedon

Ferny Creek Spring Show Saturday 19th & Sunday 20th Ferny Creek Horticultural Hall

PRELIMINARY NOTICE

The HSOV (which includes us) has been invited by Gardening Australia officials to take part in Gardening Australia Live at Caulfield Race Course. To be held from September 30th to October 3rd. This has previously been held in both Sydney and Brisbane. Details are still to be worked out.

Books for Sale

We have the 2 books of Christine Yeo for sale at \$20 each to members. Christine has a NCCPG Salvia collection in South Devon and has been collecting and growing salvias since 1978. She is generous with her knowledge, as we discovered when she visited several of our gardens a few years ago.

Enquiries Lyndi Garnett 9803 4534 or available at our Salvia Gatherings

The Salvia Spectacular

April 3rd and 4th. 2004

A report of the Salvia Spectacular put on by the Salvia Study Group of Victoria at the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Hall... in a fantastic setting up in the Dandenongs.

Firstly a big **thankyou** to everyone who offered their time and assistance in setting up, maintaining stalls and their services, then the dismantling of the Spectacular after the weekends' event, it was the best show of volunteers to date and all very much appreciated, thankyou so much!

A huge thankyou goes to the folk who donated plants for the display...

Des Lawrence and the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens.

Robyn Powell from Mylor in South Australia.

Di Larkman of Larkman Nurseries, Lilydale.

Jillian Barkell, for all her time and effort in maintaining a large range of salvias not only for display purposes but also a huge bank of plants for the sales area.

Trudi Fry for her wonderful display of contained salvias and supply of plants for sale,

Quite a number of salvias, (larger and smaller quantities) donated for the 'Spectacular' from miscellaneous donors (including the writer) and a wonderful effort by volunteers working under the expert supervision of Elly Roos in the plant sales area.

I would also like to thank the husbands and volunteers who did a lot of 'behind the scenes,' jobs like carting and lifting plants, attending to vehicle parking, down at the gate admissions and putting up the signs.

The 'talks' and the guided walks through the gardens were also of great benefit to the public thankyou to those folk who got the ball rolling!

Extra stallholders were Lyndi Garnett and daughter Naomi... and Judi Forrester from Otway Herbs who all had a successful time.

Ferny Creek once again did a marvellous job with the catering and assisting with the parking... we are very lucky to have such a great venue to hold the Salvia Spectacular and a big thankyou to Ferny Creek Horticultural Society.

It was another successful event all round and what a way to meet with all manner of gardeners and salvia growers and enthusiasts alike, not only state wide but from Interstate as well.

Buses ferried folk from as far away as Bairnsdale which included those distant members of the Salvia Study Group who organised this trip, folk from New South Wales and quite a few visitors from the South Australian Salvia Study Group, great to see everyone.

Other visitors included representatives from the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, the Geelong Botanic Gardens and the Botanic Gardens of Hobart in Tasmania which was a great way to share information and knowledge regarding salvias and climate etc.

The theme this time was to put emphasis on the hardy salvias, ones that would take the drier conditions and get by with a minimum of water, which showed in the Floor Garden layout.

The main bench displays were set out as a colour range of flowering salvias with the rarer 'specials' set out in a section and 'Salvias in Containers' set along one wall while the opposite wall displayed a static display of 'The World of Salvias' in photographic form.

Along the back of the hall were displays of 'What is a Salvia/ What is a Sage' plants that may look like a Salvia, have a common name of Sage but really aren't salvias at all. There was a magnificent plant in full bloom, which I might add, caught everyone's eye, the rather rare *Brillantaisia subulugurica*, known as the 'Giant Salvia' which really isn't a salvia at all but a plant from the Acanthaceae family which grows in the rain forests of Zimbabwe and Africa.. With giant blue sage-like flowers it could have easily been mistaken for a salvia, but on closer observation one could see the calyx was the wrong shape, the structure of the flower has a top 'hood' and a lower lip but was still a different structure to that of the salvia and there were more than two anthers, not to mention the shape and texture of the leaves.

Also on display were large poster boards of 'Where to see Salvias' which showed various nurseries and a good display of salvias growing in the Melbourne and Geelong Botanic Gardens. Along the same wall one could see an extensive arrangement of Medicinal and Culinary Salvias with display signs indicating their usefulness to mankind and the countries of origin. [Thanks to Pat Anderson for the *S. tiliifolia* and *S. reflexa* grown from seed she brought back from her last trip to the UK.] These are both annuals and they usually set a fair amount of seed but these are species of which the Salvia Study Group have lost track , over time.

I guess everyone saw at least one favourite salvia at the show and one that would be hard to beat would have to be *Salvia dombeyi* , just dripping with long red blooms, another favourite was *S. melissodora* in full bloom.

The front table, near the entrance, showed many of the salvia blooms in the 'Brass and Glass' display in all colours and sizes. This table also displayed the 'Black Knight Cottage', a small crafted cottage made entirely from the stems of *Salvia 'Black Knight'* , the small potted 'tree' overhanging the cottage with a container of 'plants' on the opposite side was also a salvia... *Salvia runcinata*. An abundance of *S. 'Black Knight'* flowers were placed in a vase nearby which helped complete the scene.

Meg Bentley

Editor's note...Meg was the presiding genius over the Salvia Spectacular. She gets top marks for hard work, inspiration, skill, knowledge of salvias and people and tact.



A LETTER FROM MARJORIE

Dear Members,

What a joy it was to catch up with old friends at the Salvia Spectacular!

The Salvia Study Group is to be congratulated on a magnificent display of hundreds of different salvias that ranged from tiny ground covers to massive, two-metre specimens in equally massive pots. The logistics of manoeuvring those pots into position on the benches must have been a worry but a triumph for the Salvia Group.

The range of colours was certainly spectacular — from creamy white to apricot, pale to rich pink, scarlet and burgundy, to the deep purples and blues. The benches overflowed with riches.

One particularly special feature was that every specimen was clearly identified with its common name, its botanical name, its country of origin, its growing conditions and anything else known about it. In many instances there was a superb photograph of the plant in full bloom. Many days of work had been spent on

this aspect of the show alone. Added to this was the quality and selection of plants for sale, all very tempting, at ridiculously low prices. Very few visitors left without five or six treasures.

The foyer, where refreshments were served by the Ferny Creek hall catering group, displayed salvia specimens in brass pots that had been polished to a mirror sheen. These pots were treasures that had been bought over the years by Trudi Fry from op shops.

I have followed Trudi's "Selby Saga" with interest since she began to record her exploits in *The Herb Age*. I have been able to appreciate her trials and efforts and the information that she has acquired and is prepared to share, together with all the other members of the Salvia Group. Their knowledge was eagerly sought by most visitors.

An additional pleasure for me was getting there. The Dandenongs were at their greenest. Very few introduced species, such as the rhododendrons and azaleas were in bloom, and there was little autumn colour on the exotic trees. This meant that the mountain ash and the vibrant green tree ferns showed at their best. There was even that lovely forest smell that is unmistakably Australian bush.

The Salvia Study Group is undoubtedly one of the Society's success stories. Congratulations to all the members of the Branch. Well done!

Marjorie Hutchinson (copied from Herbage with permission)

What to do in the Winter Months

Just because it is getting colder and winter is coming, doesn't mean you have to stay inside. No, us gardeners love this weather and get on with all those jobs that need doing before it gets too cold- ideally in April/May, that have just gone. It is a good time to cut back the *Salvia greggii* & *S. microphylla* to get some bushy growth happening before it gets too cold. If your plants are established in the garden, give them a good hair-cut with the shears—leave some flowers on to give colour. If they are in pots, be careful not to cut them back too much, just down to a good pair of new shoots (they don't over-winter in pots well). If you have left the task too late or live in a cold area, perhaps wait until spring/summer when it is warm enough and the plants are really starting to shoot.

It is no good trying to take cuttings of *S. greggii* now, as they just sit and look sickly (unless of course you have bottom heat and a warm sheltered spot.) The best time to take *S. greggii* and *S. microphylla* cuttings is when their sap is running in the summer.

If you have kept your bushes fairly neat during the year then just clean them up and there should be enough flowers to carry on during the winter, especially *S. 'Sierra Pink'* which flowers all year round.

This pruning also goes for most other perennial salvias, especially the grey leafed types—tidy up and cut back to good shoots. When it is warmer, and they are putting on new growth, then cut back properly. Although all these plants don't actually hibernate or go dormant, they actually don't grow either.

The cooler months really belong to the taller, large leaf salvias from the tropics! It is now that many start to put on their finery, bursting into bloom that will take some of them well into spring and early summer. Some early ones have already started. *Salvia purpurea*, *S. iodantha*, *S. dombeyii*, *S. involucrata spp(tall)*, *S. madrensis*, *S. pulchella*, *S. confertiflora*, *S. wagneriana*, *Salvia 'Costa Rica Blue'* with many others not far behind.

Now is the time to take cuttings of these beauties. They strike easily without being stressed by the heat or transpiring too much. Of course you'll have to find shoots that are not in bud—if you can ; but new young shoots should do nicely. Take tip cuttings of about 10-12-15cm long; cut off the bud if there is one-down to 2 new shoots. Trim off the lower leaves to 2-3 young leaves at the top. Cut in half any large leaves. This done to (1) reduce the moisture leaving the leaves , (transpiring too much) (2) to make more room in the pot. If you are taking large batches there is no room for all those leaves, they only cause rotting (fungi in the pot is not a good look) and large leaves will only fall off anyway.

As I only have an outside area for my cuttings, leaving them to the elements, a good draining potting mix is necessary. These particular salvias don't really need any hormone treatment at this time of year, they should all strike easily, as their sap is running. Put the cuttings in and put the pot in a sheltered spot, out of the wind and out of the way of hail or a heavy downpour for about a week, to allow them to settle down in peace, so they can get on with the job of producing roots. After a week or so, bring them out more in to the open. Leave them, until you see new leaves appearing or roots at the bottom of the pot – always check for these roots – as some can produce new leaves and still no roots!

Now it's time to pot them up. Fill the pots with a good potting mix, either your own or a commercial mix you are happy with. Invert the pot of cuttings and allow them to come out carefully in your hand. Tease the roots out carefully. Put your cutting in a pot half filled with soil. Fill around the roots, to the top of the pot. Give the pot a good tap, to settle the soil and give it a good water – to get out any air bubbles, to stop the stress of the plant from being moved and manhandled allow the plant to settle once more. Don't forget to label the pots. There is nothing worse than a batch of pots and you can't remember what they are. It's easily done, especially as so many have similar leaves!

Apart from taking cuttings now – these taller beauties, possibly need putting back in their place as the strong winds probably blow them all over the place. If they are planted by a fence or solid background, they can be trussed as a whole plant to this fence/wall in several places by placing a series of stakes (tall/medium) around the plant in a semi-circle. Run a string line half way up to catch the young shoots and another string line at the top, to stop the older, stronger canes from flopping. Give them room to move freely with the wind but keep them contained. This method can be used in an island bed or a large bed. A series of stakes right around the plant in a ring is another method. Don't try to tie up individual stems to stakes as they will either come away (being very strong) or will break in the wind.

Apart from clearing away any old debris at the soil level and placing fresh mulch, give a feed of fertiliser as these plants are still flowering and are in need of refreshments. There isn't much more to do in the salvia garden except to enjoy the magnificent array of blooms that these plants produce. When picking flowers for bringing inside, pick the bloom in full bud or just opening. It will last longer without dropping flowers everywhere. Enjoy your winter tasks. Lyndi Garnett

News from Gympie Valley

Can our summers get any hotter and more humid here in SEQ? I grow quite a large selection of cottage-style plants and what these poor things have put up with this summer is quite amazing. Most of the salvias fared well - only a few collapsing in the extreme heat. Quite a few aborted their flowers (toasted more like it!) and some even shed leaves. The salvias that I did lose were *Salvia lycoides*, *S.darcyi*, *S. forskahlei*, *S.greggi* 'yellow' and *la luna*. I've also found *Lepechinia hastata* difficult to keep alive through this period. *Salvia sagittatus* is a poor performer in summer but a prolific bloomer in winter (if it survives the humid heat).

On a recent trip to Althea Drew's extensive salvia garden at Nanango in the South Burnett (Althea prunes her salvias hard and regularly resulting in a superb floral display) we discussed our losses and realised *S.lycoides* is quite a difficult plant to grow around the SEQ area. *Salvia darcyi* drops dead overnight too, but I would like to add that a chance seedling (we presume from *S.darcyi*) popped up nearby in Althea's garden and has outperformed its probable parent. This seedling blooms all year and if pruned regularly it makes a great plant. Althea has called this hardy seedling 'Josh'. It grows to about 1.5 m with masses of scarlet flowers. (Yes we are completing the necessary documentation on this salvia for the records).

Lots of other chance seedlings have performed very well in Althea's garden and some have outstanding qualities and colour combinations. I have planted quite a few here at Gympie and most are coping very well in the heat. A couple of seedlings from Christine Yeo look exactly like the parent plant but have different flower colours - these I feel are worthy of growing due to their hardiness in most SEQ conditions.

Two other outstanding seedlings, possibly from *microphylla* and *greggii*, are producing compact growth with delicate pink and mauve flowers and put on a good show in the heat.

A couple of salvias I really enjoy growing and selling are *S. microphylla* 'San Carlos Festiva' and *S. muirii*. Both produce masses of flowers nearly all year and don't get out of hand. These would be suitable for container or small gardens.

My top 5 toughest drought hardy salvias for our area are *S. discolor*, *S. 'Marine Blue'*, *S. azurea*, *S. melissadora* and many of the *microphylla* hybrids. Our garden relies on rain from the heavens and throughout the drought they still found energy to bloom.

The best summer bloomers here are *Salvia leucantha*, *S. Mexicana* 'Limelight', *S. 'Costa Rica Blue'*, *S. 'Phyllis Fancy'*, *S. guaranitica* large form (non running) and *S. 'Marine Blue'*.

I'm a little disappointed with *S. 'Hot Lips'* as it's mainly producing red flowers instead of being bicoloured. It gets very leggy quickly and pruning needs to be done every couple of months. I have ripped out all my *S. 'Margaret Arnolds'* as in our climate it gets very leggy also and flowers are few and far between, also die-back was evident in all my plants. I love the colour of the flower but the plant needs to be a more prolific flowerer to retain its place in my collection.

As I write this 'report' we are experiencing good rain and cyclonic winds. Althea's garden is very exposed to wind, so it will be very interesting to see how her salvias cope. Our ground here at Gympie is quite wet which will be a good test for some of the above mentioned seedlings. If the weather remains cool I feel they will survive - it is the wet coupled with high humidity that spells disaster.

Deb Follett (Hillside Nursery, Gympie, Qld - 07 5483 2804)

Guidance in planting Salvias

As relatively new members of the Salvia Study Group, we wish to thank the committee and other members of the group who have been so willing and prepared to give of their time and knowledge in the promotion of salvias as a plant group for growth in Australian gardens. This has been evident from the help and advice given to us and personal observations made when attending propagation from cuttings workshop, a Xmas social event, a formal meeting of the group; and in particular at the recent successful Salvia Spectacular early in April this year. As a result, our interest in salvias has increased, which in turn has motivated us to learn more about these plants.

During the last 6 to 8 months we have built up a collection of between 20 to 30 different types of salvias in pots and tubes, but to date have only planted out a few of these into our garden. However, as we become increasingly aware of our limited, or in some cases, total absence of knowledge in relation to the plants we possess, we have developed a reluctance to continue with this task. To assist us in the formulation of a garden plan, and to improve our chances of achieving a desirable effect and outcome, some guidance and advice would be appreciated in relation to those salvias we have yet to plant out (the common or botanical names of which appear below)

Salvia Plant List

involucrata 'Romantic Rose', *corrugata*, *lyrata*, *microphylla* 'Margarets Rose', *hirtella*, *scabra*, *apiana* 'White Sage', *lanceolata*, *patens* *iodantha*, 'Bluebird', *rubiginosa*, *discolor*, 'Christine Yeo', 'Costa Rica Blue'

Perhaps the Salvia Newsletter could be used as an appropriate forum for assisting with our request, and any similar ones which may arise in the future, whether from established or newer members. If so, we would suggest a reply format utilizing the following headings be adopted when providing information about relevant salvias, as in our opinion, the advice then given should prove to be of considerable benefit in meeting the needs of the members concerned:-

General Description

Country of origin: plant type e.g. herbaceous perennial, annual etc.; propagation e.g. from cuttings and/or seeds, time of year

Size: Expected size in an average garden when fully grown i.e. approx. height and width in feet and/or metres

Position: Preferable planting position i.e. full sun or shade etc.

Flowers: Colour of both the flower and the calyx, time of flowering (months of year) or season

Other noteworthy characteristics (in particular unique or distinctive features)

Exceptional drought tolerance, significant bee or bird attraction, aromatic leaves, special pruning requirements

etc. Jennifer and Geoff Ellis

Greetings from Werri Beach N.S.W.

As I type, lovely rain is falling and re-filling my garden water tanks. Yesterday, on the promise of rain, I raced around with some blood and bone and compost and mulch to take advantage of whatever moisture we would get and thankfully it looks like it's set in for the day at least.

This has been one of the hottest summers for a while and my sandy soil has been very thirsty. I just couldn't give it enough water. Most things have survived however. Just when you think you might give up, you get a storm which invigorates the garden and gives new hope.

Last week however, there was a raging south-easterly which burnt all the edges of the Salvias at the front of the garden on the street. Needless to say, it doesn't look very attractive at the moment. The Madrensis was about to send up its flower spikes and I had to cut them off, they looked so ugly. I'm hoping they will come back with the rain. 'Black Knight' suffered as well and I don't know whether I did the wrong thing in cutting it almost back to the ground. It wasn't a pretty sight! Luckily, we only get the odd savage s/easter, so generally they are both fine in that position.

Some of the Salvias in the back garden facing the north east have not done as well as I'd hoped, so when the weather starts to cool, they are going to be moved. *S.africana caerulea*, *S.broussonetti* and (I think) *S.holwayii* will be moved further up the slope in place of a purple plectranthus which I am having to water too much. They did not cope too well with the wind and the dryness and might get more nourishment in their new spot.

Salvia lanceolata has proved to be one of the hardiest and most visitors comment on its unusual colouring. Most of the smaller salvias have flowered although not spectacularly, but next year with more growth and nourishment, I'm hoping for big things! I love *S.forskaohlei* with its lovely mauve flowers. Can anyone tell me what eats the edges of the leaves of *S.superba*? They continually have a chewed look about them. I'm about to give up on *S.spathacea*! I don't seem to be able to find the right spot for it.

We have just had the sewerage connected to the house so, of course, there was more digging but not too much plant loss this time. I have created a small native garden walk where the connection is right at the bottom of the back garden which I hope will be successful. I have become interested in some of the smaller natives and I'm going to try some native daisies from seed.

Now that autumn is almost here, I'll be looking at adding some more salvias. This is the best time in the garden and I can't wait for the cooler weather to get stuck into moving plants around and planting new ones.

Maureen Cox. (This just missed the last Salvia News. Ed)

The Manual for Salvia Growers By Meg Bentley

Planting Pruning Propagation

Sun Shade Size Shape ----- Flower/Leaf Colours-----Maintenance

Price \$30

Enquiries to Meg Bentley Ph, 03 5964 9360 or 03 59649 372

A GARDEN IN TYABB

After visiting the Salvia Spectacular I realize how insignificant my growing collection is, but inspired by the display I keep planting. (After helping and being surrounded by all the expertise, I am convinced that as a Salvia expert, I am a good carrier of pots and a reasonable 'car park attendant'.) One can only admire the time, energy and skill required to make the event such an outstanding success. While many of us helped over the weekend, it was only a few who put in the long hours, weeks and in some cases months of preparation and planning. This is probably inevitable but wouldn't it be great to find a way to change it?

The 30 mm. of rain we received at the beginning of April did nothing for the garden but it did put enough in the tanks to be able to spare the odd bucketful of water for those plants on the verge of departing. Subsequent rain, while not yet penetrating more than a centimetre or two into the topsoil has certainly helped. Suddenly plants are looking fresh and healthy. *Salvia* 'Costa Rica Blue' which has flowered continually but fairly sparsely, is now enjoying life, *S. gesneraeflora* 'Tequila' is demanding attention with a spectacular display of black and red and the flowers on *S. 'Anthony Parker'* are larger and more vibrant (or maybe just have less dust on them).

The wind has again been destructive – a *S. madrensis*, which I have kept alive through all the dry weather over the last 18 months, produced its first flower spikes but was flattened in a wind storm early this month (May). I have since enclosed it in a wire 'cage' but in doing so, lost about 2/3 of it as it broke away at ground level but I think it has been saved. *S. involucrata* (probably a form of *S. involucrata bethelli*, although it is very slightly different from my other examples of that plant) had grown to almost 3 metres tall – now due to the wind and the weight of flowers, part of it is still as tall, part of it gone and part just collapsed so that it is almost 5 metres across. At least it is protecting the plants it now covers. I have also attached a photo (and sent another separately) One is *S. involucrata Bethelli* and the other may be as well. If the photos are clear you will see that in one the lip on the underside of the flower is cupped while on the other it is curled under. As this is consistent across the plant it is easy to tell which one the flower is from. Is this significant or just Bevan making some meaningless observation?

Can someone tell me about *Salvia* 'Bluebird'? I have had one in for nearly two years. The flowers last year really amounted to nothing and while there are many more flowers developing at present I am not sure that they will amount to much. A lot of these were sold at the Salvia Spectacular so I hope I just have an uncooperative example.

As a new grower of *Salvias* I continually have the problem of identifying them. In my garden I use the 'geographic method' i.e. if they stay where I have planted them I know what they are. Not a lot of help anywhere but at home. One of the benefits of meeting with those who know is learning what to look for. I have both *S. 'Black Knight'* and *S. 'Purple Majesty'* in the garden and in spite of holding the flowers side by side I could not see the difference. I asked about this at a recent get together and it was suggested that 'Purple Majesty' was green at the base of the calyx. I have not seen reference to this in any of my books but when I went home and checked my plants that was the case. The one with the 'Purple Majesty' label was green at the base of the calyx. It helps when you know what to look for.

Bevan Whelan

Lemon Tree Cottage

With the Open Garden weekend, the Salvia Spectacular and overseas visitors gone, one month has passed by. Over that period only a few hours were spent in the garden. Any spare time has been spent planning for changes to two garden beds.

The garden is winding down for its winter sleep, and the Autumn/Winter salvias are coming to their peak. These are Salvia concolor, S. tubifera, S. fallax, S. iodantha, S. elegans 'Pineapple', S. Agnes, S. Anthony Parker'. Still in their budding stage are S. chiapas, S. elegans 'Honey Melon', S. sprucei, S. lavanduloides, S. purpurea, S. karvinskii, S. curtiflora and probably more that I just haven't seen hidden amongst the 6' tall blue hydrangeas still needing to be pruned. I usually prune them later than most people.

Most of the Spring/Summer flowering salvias are still putting on a good show. The ever-flowering and reliable S. grahamii and S. Red Dragon are and have been at their peak for 3 months. As for S. Waverly and S. chiapensis, do they ever stop flowering? Hopefully not. They are the backbone of the garden. S. 'Marine Blue' is not ready to hibernate yet and S. 'Phyllis Fancy' has another month or two left.

Just wanted to mention to the members that our S. chiapensis is 5' in height! How could this be, you ask? It is in a bed only one foot wide against the decking and pathway. It gets pruned back from the pathway and nowhere else, hence it is growing upwards. It is a really tough plant and takes well to a good pruning no matter what situation it is growing in and it will stay bushier. The climbing rose behind it is Renae and the combination of both pinks looks stunning.

As I write I am waiting for my last visitors to tour the garden for the year. My plans for the rest of the week are to dig up two complete garden beds and replant them. The garden bed out the front has been bugging me for years. I have finally got the corner of this garden right but am still struggling to get the combination of planting along this side to suit the conditions, which are morning shade and hot afternoon sun. Plans are now to plant S. karvinskii, S. 'Costa Rica Blue', S. mexicana 'Limelight', S. mexicana major and S. 'Black Knight', alternating Summer/Autumn and Autumn/Winter flowering salvias. Growing in front and between will be S. involucrata 'Joan' and S. 'Indigo Spires' growing up and through the tall backdrop. The aim with these is that their stems will be supported by the larger salvias but the flower spikes will trail through the open branches of the taller ones. I'm hoping the effect will work well. I'm still deciding on what the next level of salvias will be and tossing up whether to plant S. africana caerulea or S. scabra as a border along the rock edging.

Watching the growth of salvias and seeing how they perform constantly gives me new ideas on how I can best combine them to give the maximum effect. It is sometimes necessary to add another species of plant to create contrast in flower and leaf form. I find this a real challenge, hence the continual digging and replanting. I'm sure there are lots of my fellow gardeners who do the same and share my enthusiasm for doing so.

At the Salvia Spectacular I still bought salvias I didn't yet have, such as S. regla, S. confertiflora and S. mexicana minor. There were two new cultivars for sale: S. guaranitica 'Violet Eyes' and S. microphylla 'Mystique'. It will be exiting to see how they perform.

I have just remembered to mention Salvia 'Chiquita Blue'. I shifted it a year ago and it has grown into the most beautiful plant. It is more than 3.5 feet high, very open with flower spikes 1.5 feet in length. It started flowering in early March and is still at its peak now in Mid May, probably it will last another two months. We'll wait and see.

Elly Roos

A Salvia in Half Mourning

When Trudi Fry visited us last year she brought for us, among lots of other goodies, a small plant of *Salvia semi-atrata*. Nine months later it is over a metre high, almost a metre wide and smothered in flowers. Its name intrigued me and so I finally looked it up.

The meaning of the *semi* part is, of course, 'half'. I was a bit disappointed when W. T. Stearn in his *Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners* told me that *atratus*, - a, - um means 'blackened'. So I went to my Cassell's Latin Dictionary and there I found that Cicero used *atratus* to mean 'clothed in black' or 'in mourning'. That makes sense for *S. semi-atra*, the salvia in half mourning. Any Victorian widow, when it came time to progress from full to half mourning, would have been thrilled to put on clothing of the colour of this salvia's gloriously deep purple lower lip. *Salvia semi-atrata*, though, looks anything but mournful. In fact, Trudi first described it to me as psychedelic. It certainly looks decked out more for a disco than a cemetery with its deep green, velvety-looking foliage, plum-coloured calices, rich mauve upper lip and the deep purple, also velvety-looking lower lip. This salvia in half mourning is a truly stunning. Sheila Fox Copied from Herbage

NOTES FROM GRUYERE. SUMMER / AUTUMN 2004.

There are only a small portion of notes at this time due to the lack of water, growth and time, which has been spent with so many other things requiring extra attention and detail.

One of the main things has been 'A MANUAL FOR SALVIA GROWERS'.

It deals with information regarding the growing of Salvias, their cultivation, requirements and country of origin. Heights and widths are covered and the type of position needed, including the best situation, ie. shrubbery, middle borders or front borders, rock gardens or containers. Propagation and Pruning are also covered and the four seasons posters (A4 size). It will be ready within the next few months and will sell for \$30.

The salvia garden, on the whole, has suffered badly over summer and autumn, the past seasons have been a great lesson in showing visitors just how well some of the salvia species can survive through dry hot seasons. While autumn was just a tad cooler it still remained dry throughout, we are still having to water some of the larger containers and the garden is still very dry under the mulch, let us hope winter will bring some decent rains to at least moisten the soil.

It has been rather interesting to observe some of the salvias in other people's gardens that have been watered regularly and to see the differences in leaf size for a start and then to compare them with the same species here in my garden in Gruyere. Because the plants looked like a totally different species, I was asked to identify one particular salvia that had grown so well with plenty of moisture over summer but in a cooler climate in the Dandenongs.

It would be a very interesting exercise to note the differences between a salvia growing in its original habitat and that of its adopted home and climate.

The closest we can come to are the South African species because our climates are so similar... but when Central and South American species grow naturally in a tropical or sub-tropical climate, we don't have to over do the watering or feeding bit, they usually do come good in the autumn, once the summer weather starts to cool and precipitation falls and creates a little microclimate of its own.

Personally, I prefer to see the salvias grown hard, they are a genus that can adapt pretty well to our harsh climate. The type of leaves lose some of their character when grown too lush and I've noticed too that the flowers can alter in colour, looking somewhat lighter and in some cases a little spindly. I guess it's a bit like growing herbs, the more they are fed and watered the less fragrance and oil content you will find within the plant.

I have been looking at parts of the garden that can be either cleared out, pruned back hard or areas that I will remove older and/or unwanted plants, replacing them with salvias and other hardy companions.

Even after these dry months, I still have to say that the hardiest salvias of all for this garden have been the species from South Africa...

Salvia africana caerulea, *S. africana lutea*, *S. chamelaeagnea*
S. disermis, *S. dolomitica*, *S. lanceolata*, *S. muiirii*, *S. repens*, *S. runcinata*, *S. scabra* and *S. somalensis*.

Other hardy species are *S. apiana*, *S. blancoana*, *S. broussonetii*, *S. canariensis*, *S. chamaedryoides*, *S. discolor*, *S. lavandulifolia*, *S. leucophylla*, *S. mellifera*, *S. munzii*, *S. taraxacifolia*, *S. viscosa* and *S. Waverley*, all of the above species didn't even droop right through the summer/autumn period and not a drop of water given, apart from drizzle when the heavens offered it.

While other species may be hardy and went without any moisture they did show signs of drooping until the weather changed and they picked right up again. So I would have to say that apart from Australian native plants, these salvias are by far the hardiest shrubby perennials to have in any garden! Meg Bentley.

Raising Salvias from Seed in Victoria

For salvia enthusiasts in Victoria, detailed information for specific species is not easy to find. The literature provides some information and hopefully, the internet will proved more, but it is our role as a Salvia Study Group to test these theories for Victorian conditions.

Seed collection and storage

Seeds need to be fully mature before collection. So what happens in the many Salvia species that don't have a ring of hairs to hold the seed in? In these cases, seed needs to be collected on a daily basis. Do we know which ones have a ring of hairs that keep the seed in? In any event, seeds should be collected when dry (otherwise mould could set in), cleaned (fragments of plant material removed), labelled and stored in a cool, dry and dark place. Dufresne says that most Salvia seed can be cleaned easily and will last for about 5 years with refrigeration. I imagine seed viability will vary with species.

Question. Has anyone tested this locally?

Another interesting aspect is availability of seed. Salvia seed is not widely available on a commercial basis in Australia. The Diggers Club sells a few species only. So, in general, we have to collect our own. How many of the species growing in Australia actually set seed? More specifically, how many set seed in the Melbourne area? Environmental conditions must be suitable, possibly even including specific pollinators for some species. English authors note that tender species from Mexico and Central and S. America, such as *S. concolor*, *leucantha*, *blepharoplylla*, *buchananii*, *discolor*, *oppositiflora*, *confertiflora*, *atrocyana*, *uliginosa* and *dorisiana* don't set seed in the cold conditions in England. Then there are some hybrid species, such as *S. Purple Majesty*, *S. Indigo Spires*, *S. Black Knight* and *S. Waverly* that are sterile. I am trying to compile a list of which species do set seed and would be very grateful for your individual observations.

Temperature and light requirements

Hartmann, Kester & Davies (p. 625) report general conditions for germination of *Salvia* seed as temperatures of 20 – 30⁰ C and exposure to light. Beazley (pp 23 & 44), writing about English conditions, notes temperature requirements for herbaceous perennial species as 16 – 18⁰ under glass in Spring, and 15 – 18⁰ under glass in late winter for annual species, with a soil temperature minimum of 15⁰ and an air temperature minimum of 13⁰.

The seed company, Jellito (pp 108 & 138), lists its *Salvia* seeds as needing to be kept in constant moisture (not wet) with minimum temperatures of about 20⁰, and covered thinly, with the exception of very small seeds.

Sutton (p. 123) quotes many sources as saying that light is necessary for *Salvia* germination, but that to the best of his knowledge and experience, this is not so. He recommends covering the seed with 3 to 6 mm compost. Others, like the staff at the RBG, recommend a thin covering of vermiculite which will retain water while allowing light penetration.

Karamanos (p. 95), in a chapter on the cultivation of economically-important species in Greece, maintains that optimal temperatures for seed germination lie between 10 and 20⁰ C for *S. pomifera* and *S. fruticosa*, 10 – 25⁰ C for *S. officinalis* and 10 to 30⁰ C for *S. sclarea*. He also claims that germination is favoured by darkness, with only a slight enhancement by light for *S. pomifera*.

Breaking dormancy

For germination to be initiated, three conditions must be fulfilled: the seed must be viable (embryo alive), the seed must be subjected to appropriate environmental conditions (water, temperature, oxygen and light) and primary dormancy (a set of conditions preventing immediate germination) must be overcome. Internal processes leading to removal of primary dormancy are known as after-ripening. After-ripening requires a period of time, and sometimes some special treatment.

1. Chemical treatment

Gibberellins (gibberellic acid) are plant growth regulators that stimulate growth not only in seeds, but also in the growing tip and between nodes. They are sometimes used to stimulate germination of seeds, including *Salvia* species. Sutton (p. 124) maintains that germination of some salvia species can be improved and hastened by a short period of treatment with gibberellic acid, and that in a few cases, germination may be difficult to achieve without its aid. He recommends soaking in a very dilute solution of between 0.02 and 0.1% for up to 3 hours. Elsewhere, Dufresne (p. 58) claims a few salvia seed dormancies can be broken by exposure to a 100-parts-per-million dilution of gibberellic acid. Stewart (p.45) notes that gibberellins are able to overcome a variety of dormancy mechanisms, including the need for stratification, for light, for smoke and for after-ripening of the embryo in some plants.

2. Temperature treatment

Moist cold treatment or stratification (moist cold treatment of seeds in layers of moist medium) is intended to replicate winter conditions for species that, in the wild, have to survive winter conditions. By a short period of say 6 weeks in moist medium in the refrigerator, followed by normal germination conditions, seeds can be persuaded that winter has been and gone. It would be expected that species from northern Europe would require such treatment if freshly-collected seed was required to germinate. Dufresne (p. 58) says that most of the species that require stratification are Californian and Eurasian species.

3. Smoke treatment

It has been established that many vegetation types in areas adapted to bush fire regimes, such as parts of Australia, the South African Fynbos and the Californian Chapparal country will only germinate reliably after chemicals released by smoke have penetrated the seed coat. Consequently it is possible that some South African and Californian *Salvia* species may need this treatment. I think germination of *S. clevelandii* and maybe even *S. mellifera* and *S. apiana* might be enhanced by smoke treatment, but I shall have to wait until it warms up again to test this.

4. Other treatments

What about seeds with hard coats. Do any *Salvias* have particularly hard coats that need nicking? Or do any have chemical inhibitors that need to be removed by leaching or passing through the acidic digestive tracts of certain animals.

A few of the results of my trials

I have only done some limited trials and, in general, germination rates have been fairly poor. I believe, however, that soil temperature and day length is important for some species. I think late Spring to early Summer would be the ideal time, but to be able to raise seeds under glass would be a huge advantage.

I have demonstrated that fresh *S. viridis* seed sown in Autumn does not germinate without stratification.

I have also demonstrated that *S. patens* will germinate well in total darkness.

I have collected seed of a few species over the past 2, and in some cases, 3 seasons, and compared results in recent tests. None of these samples are large enough or comprehensive enough to be statistically significant. However, the following results may be of interest. For *S. Marine Blue*, *S. lanceolata*, *S. africana caerulea* and *S. sclarea*, germination rates for seed collected between January and March 2003 were better than for seed collected in 2004. In contrast, the reverse was true for *S. forskaohlei*. And for *S. chamaedryoides*, seed collected in 2004 germinated better than seed collected in 2002, while for *S. somalensis*, very high germination rates resulted from seed collected in both 2004 and 2002.

In this comparative trial and others, where the seeds were soaked overnight, there appeared to be no clear relationship between sinking, floating and seed viability. In fact, using a large batch of *S. sclarea* collected in 2003, there appeared to be no significant difference in germination rate whether or not the seed was soaked overnight or whether or not perlite was added to the seed raising mix (Debco). Comparisons with another brand of mix were interesting, with Debco winning hands down.

species	Source of seed	No. of seed sown	No. of days before 1 st seedling emergence	No. seedlings after 1 month	Comment
sclarea 03	own	20	6	10	Debco + perlite SEED SOAKED
sclarea 03	own	20	7	11	Debco + perlite SEED UNSOAKED
sclarea 03	own	20	7	9	Debco, no perlite SEED SOAKED
sclarea 03	own	20	6	12	Debco, no perlite SEED UNSOAKED

Hybridisation

Last, but not least, no discussion about seed germination should be without some reference to hybridization, but this is a huge area and will be left to another time.

I have recently joined the Yahoo discussion site on the internet, so I am hoping to get some more up to date information and answers to some of my questions this way. However, as a group, we need to collect seed, test it, make observations etc to learn more about behaviour in our own environmental conditions. If anyone has any observations, especially about setting of seed and viability, to share, I would love to hear from them.

Pat Anderson, April 2004

Sources:

Beazley, M. (ed) 1997: The Complete Book of Plant Propagation

Dufresne, R. F. 1995: "Sage Advice", American Nurseryman, August

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Jellito 2003 : Perennial Seed Catalogue

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Sutton, J. 1999: The Gardeners' Guide to Growing Salvias

<p>Thank you for these interesting articles. The next <i>Salvia News</i> is due out in September, so I would like to get your articles in August, perhaps by the second week, to allow me time to get them ready for printing. <i>Trudi</i></p>
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Bairnsdale News

Here is a brief account of my introduction to the salvia 'family'. Two of my dear friends, Grace and Jane are encouraging me to become a gardener. They both have wonderful gardens and Jane has always liked salvias, she kept telling me how 'beautiful' and 'lovely' particular salvias were. I would reply, "Oh yes" and be polite. Until she talked me into going to The Salvia Expo several years ago, then I believed salvias were so awesome that I needed to have some.

Most of that lot passed on due to either, frost, weeds or neglect but certainly not due to lack of water as they love the dry, or most of them do. Well I nearly gave up, and then I found *Salvia africana lutea*, *S. 'Waverly'*, *S. somalensis* and something like *S. argentea*, all flowering in the tall Kikuyu grass the next year.

I live on a sheep property out of Bairnsdale. We have experienced dry weather for quite a few years now. It becomes quite depressing to mention the word 'drought', so we don't any more. Our house and garden and some livestock dams are all serviced by our bore, which has water that is excellent to drink as well. Our first bore was powered by a windmill, however that bore eventually sanded in probably due to more bores in the district and of course Esso BHP using millions of litres of underground water per day. I have heard that Esso uses 92% of our underground aquifer. The next bore we put in is powered by electricity and pumps water from depth of 240ft.

Flowers certainly make a house appear more cheerful. And I have found that salvias seem to flower for such a long time. Since my first attempt I have tried and lost a few, but more salvias are learning to survive my gardening technique, which is so easy care. We have frosts down to -4c and it is lovely to see dormant variety salvias reappear next season. I took their tags away because I thought they had passed on too, luckily I didn't dig them up as well. *Salvia microphylla* *SPPS* are doing very well and are a picture, especially *S. 'Hot Lips'*. It is fascinating to see the white and pink flowers, you could imagine each had been kissed by a lady wearing bright pink lipstick leaving her loving lips imprinted thereon.

Salvias I have since purchased and I am excited about growing are *Salvia canariensis*, (which I already had in the garden unidentified), *S. agnes*, *S. atrocynea*, *S. buchani*, *S. chameleagnea*, *S. involucrata* 'Joan', *S. coahuilensis*, *S. 'Christine Yeo'*, *S. miniata* *S. gesneriiflora*, *S. iodantha*, *S. hierosolymitana*, *S. spathacea*, *S. 'Cookie'*, *S. austriaca*, *S. leucantha*, and different *microphyllas* and *greggiis*. Seeing how a garden can look with fine flowers blooming, aromatic foliage, bees humming, butterflies and birds flying around and the kids bringing me a bunch of flowers for cheeriness. Well a little more effort is probably not too much to offer, is it?

Flo McMahon

Stratford News

I can't believe it is 6 weeks since the Salvia Spectacular at Ferny Creek. I managed to help promote salvias by bringing a bus load of 33 people from the Sale area, to the Spectacular, then to stay overnight in Croydon and on to the Melbourne Flower and Garden Show next day.

I enjoyed catching up with all Salvia Study Group members and buying lots of salvias to add to my collection.

I must share with you an unbelievable experience, one I won't forget, or more to the point, my friends won't let me forget.

After getting home from the salvia weekend away and bringing over 30 salvias to live in my garden, I spent the next 2 days planting. After digging each hole I put a few sprinkles of water-saving crystals at the bottom and in went each salvia. (I know , I can hear you telling me. I should have mixed crystals with soil first) After watering them in and getting 40pts of rain that night, you guessed it, the plants were popping out of the ground. I was speechless and just laughed seeing all my salvias pushed out of the ground. Next day I spent 2 hours digging up each plant—all 30 of them. It is incredible to see how one tiny crystal swells up to one fat, wobbly, jelly blob.

That was a month ago and I am happy to tell you all plants survived and some are now flowering. I will spray them with a product called 'Stressgard' to protect them from Jack Frost. Stressgard is made by Yates and used to be in concentrate form but now is only sold in ready to use pressure spray. A new product I found doing the same thing is 'Envy' by Amgrow I think and you can get that in concentrate form. I highly recommend it to protect any plants from being frost bitten. I only use for the first year when the plant is young. I am in Perth now visiting family and hoping we don't get any frosts while I'm away, as I haven't sprayed yet.

Happy salvia gardening. ***Jane Lee***

Some Snippets From Home and Abroad

1

The OPCAA Collection at Emerald has continued to be an excellent indication of the salvias which can withstand long, hot and dry summer conditions. Some rain fell on occasions but with extensive dry periods between rainfall the soil quickly dried, even where mulch or leafy undergrowth provided protection. The plot was hand watered only twice during this period.

The South African clan has survived very well, but dry conditions have limited the flowering of most. *Salvia dolomitica*, because of faulty pruning last autumn, has produced a great deal of new growth but no flowers.

Salvia apiana and *S. clevelandii*, both from dry areas of Southern California flowered long and brilliantly during late summer and early autumn. With the exception of *S. officinalis* "Tricolor" each of the cultivars of *S. officinalis* has survived the summer and flowered well. Even *S. 'Berggarten'*, which frequently does not flower, produced several blooms in early summer. Many of these cultivars are now over 12 years old and although still thriving, will need to be replaced next Spring.

Salvia polystachya has flowered profusely during the past two months creating a perfect back-drop to the purple foliage, of *S. officinalis* 'Purpureascent'. An amazing survivor in this plot is *S. interrupta*, from Morocco. This plant is notorious for die-back, and has not survived in most of our private collections, but has withstood the summer conditions at Emerald and to quote Betsy Clebsh, was a "dignified and beautiful plant" in early summer when in full bloom. A family of rabbits has invaded the garden, but apart from leaving scratchings, have not (as yet) included salvias in their diet.

During my recent visit to Norfolk Island I was interested to observe two forms of *Salvia coccinea* (Tropical Sage) in various parts of the island. The masses of a lovely pale pink form similar to 'Coral Nymph' sold by nurseries here were seen in cultivated gardens and a breathtakingly brilliant display of perhaps 'Lady in Red' was massed against the sandstone walls of an old convict built stables. Seen in the afternoon sunlight, the bright red flowers against dark green leaves were stunning. Many of these plants were over a metre tall. Another salvia widely used in garden displays was *S. farinacea* in a deep purple variety, These plants are treated as perennials on Norfolk Island; many of those I noticed were very woody and obviously many years old. *Salvia splendens*, 'Bonfire Salvia, many huge old plants are also used extensively for garden display.

Norfolk Island does not have any native or indigenous salvias but the red form of *salvia coccinea* appears in paddocks and cleared sections of rainforest, so perhaps it could become weedy. But what an attractive weed!

Ray Boatman

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SalviaNews

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