



SalviaNews

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

Number 20

AUTUMN MARCH APRIL MAY 2005

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The first edition of our Salvia News was April/ May 2001 and this is our 20th edition. I am amazed how far we have come from the days when we knew so little, and now, we know much more about salvias and we know, we know, so little! The friends made and the fun we have as a group is great. We share our experiences and our plants. I thank all of you for making my job as editor so interesting and for your tolerance of my inadequacy. Trudi

CALENDER OF EVENTS

March 5 (and or 6) Lyn & Bevan Whelan's garden is open from 12.30 on the Saturday for the Salvia Association.. Friends from our Study Group more than welcome. (Also Sunday pm but please ring - 59778104 - if you prefer that day)
313 Coolart Rd Somerville (Melway Map 147 J 7 [Tyabb])

April 2 & 3 The Rose ShowSalvia sales

Place: Mt Waverley Community Centre, Corner Millers Cr. and Stephenson's Rd., Mt Waverley (Melway 70 E 1) Opposite the station.

We have a stall where we can sell and promote Salvias but we do need help!

If you can spare a few hours between 2pm and 6pm on the Saturday or between 10am and 5pm Sunday please contact Elly Roos (03 9752 6712) or Jillian 97566361

April 10 Visit the Anderson Garden (**NOTE:** change of date from last Newsletter)

Time: 11am Bring food to share

Place: 98 Bradleys Lane, Warrandyte (look for large green water tank about 1km down the road on the right hand side. Drive in and park among the trees.)

May 11 Propagation at The Botanic Gardens - Limited to 10 people

\$20 dollars will be charged to cover costs. Booking with Lyndi 9803 4534 necessary

June 2nd Celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Herb Society of Victoria

July 17 Visit the garden of Laurelle Willis

Time: 11am Bring food to share - finger food preferred.

Place: 17 Nickols Crt., Boronia (Melway 64 D8)

Please send in Salvia News articles in mid- April as Trudi will be in WA in May.

ARE ALL SALVIAS HERBS ?

As we are members of the Salvia Study Group, the word Study could be relevant to us. Longtime members are aware that approximately 15 years ago, the Ornamental Plants Conservation Association of Australia asked the committee of our parent body, 'The Herb Society of Victoria', to select a genus of plants and to build up a collection for registration, and to study them, whilst saving them from extinction. In their wisdom, the committee chose the genus salvia, which is alleged to have about 800 species. Some of them are named incorrectly or have duplicated names, perhaps some are still undiscovered and with the majority still overseas, they are relatively unknown to us in Australia.

What is a Herb? As everyone knows, it is a plant, shrub, or tree with a useful purpose. Such uses are; medicinal, culinary, perfumery, clothing dyes, insect repellents, and possibly others.

Salvias with Herbal Uses One of the best known herb in the world is common sage whose botanical name is *Salvia officinalis*. Its species name '*officinalis*' indicates that it was officially known for centuries as safe for medicinal purposes. Our organized societies today with their splendid medical systems, associated with hospitals, pharmacies etc. have greatly reduced the need for herbs for medical problems. In times past the situation was very different, herbs were often a vital and only recourse. Apart from medicinal, sage had other uses too. It was so valued by the Chinese in the 17th century, that Dutch merchants found the Chinese would trade 3 chests of China tea leaves for one chest of *salvia officinalis* leaves.

Many other salvias have a herbal use. One small booklet I possess entitled , 'A Reference Guide to Medicinal & Culinary Uses of Salvias Currently Available in Australia', published by the Herb Society of South Australia, lists & briefly discusses 34 different species of salvia.

Salvias Named From Herbal Genera

Only a few salvias were available in nurseries, until recently, but are becoming more available today. Almost all salvias are known only by their botanical names. This might deter the casual gardener a little, but it definitely identifies salvias plants with no confusion. With respect to their botanical names, I have noticed that some salvias have been given species names, taken directly from the names of well- known herbal genera. The following are examples.

Salvia lavandulifolia. This plant has been called Spanish Sage from its origin in Spain, it is a smallish, herbaceous perennial, As I write in mid-November, it has now finished flowering. Its species name is taken directly from the lavender genus, *lavandula*. In his book, Sutton states that *S.lavandulifolia* is so named because its leaves are very narrow and hence similar to lavender leaves.

Salvia lavanduloides This plant is native to some of the states of Central America. It has also finished flowering in my garden. Similar to the previous salvia its species name is again taken from the lavender genus name *lavandula*. Yeo, in her 2nd book, states that it is so named because its pale, lilac-blue have a spreading lower lip very similar in shape to lavender flowers.

Salvia thymoides This salvia originated in Mexico, my thymoides is currently located in a 3''tube, obtained by courtesy of the treasurer of the Salvia Study Group, I saw beautiful specimens of this plant with its small, grayish-green elliptically shaped leaves growing in her garden recently. Its species name is easily seen to be derived from the genus name of the thymes, *thymus*. Clebsch in her book confirms this by stating that it has thyme-like leaves. She also says it is difficult to establish in most gardens but grows well in a clay or porous container. When my plant is more firmly established, I may take her advice.

Salvia glechomaefolia This is a native to Mexico, and introduced tonurseries in 1992 according to Clebsch. She states its specific name is from the genus name *glechoma*. A small group of plants with creeping and stoloniferous roots. The herb *glechoma hederacea*, 'ground ivy' or 'ale hoof' was used in former times to clarify ale to aid in production.

Salvia taraxacifolia This is the dandelion leaved sage, found on the lower slopes of the Atlas mountains in Morocco. Clebsch also states it occupies an isolated place in the salvia genus with no close allies discovered yet. My plant produced a beautiful cluster of small pink flowers. *Taraxacum* is the name of the genus to which dandelions belong. On looking at the leaves of my plant I can only agree with Sutton that it was an ideal choice of name.

Salvia scutellarioides This prostrate perennial with trailing stems, some of which root at nodes, is indigenous to several states in South America. Clebsh in her latest edition, states that it is easy to grow, but demands shade and moisture. My plant in a pot and left in the open, agrees with that statement because its growth is sparse and poor. Another plant growing in the ground under a tree is flourishing. Clebsh states that it derives its specific epithet from the genus *scutellaria*. The species of plants in that genus are known as skullcaps, some of which were very popular medicinal herbs in former times. Yeo, in her 2nd book, states how the flower has a close resemblance in its structure to those of skullcaps.

Summing up the Herbal Question

Many salvia species have a herbal usage, whilst others are named from having a close identity with other herbal genera.

As members of the 'Salvia Study Group', we have an open ended invitation to grow, study and enjoy salvias to whatever extent we wish. This invitation covers a huge genera, and each of us will decide the salvias we wish to grow and enjoy.

Bill Whitehead

In The Beginning... the O P C A A

The Salvia Study Group, as most readers would know by now, maintains a Salvia collection divided between two areas, one at Nobelius in the Dandenongs and the other at Hampton, near Brighton. What many folk would not know is the story behind the OPCA and the Salvia Collection.

Our group was formed in 1989 when the Herb Society of Victoria was invited by the Ornamental Plants Conservation Association of Australia to form a collection of plants. Salvia was chosen because as well as being ornamental, many were of medicinal and culinary value. After a two year probationary period, our collection was approved in 1993.

It is quite interesting to learn how the Ornamental Plant Conservation Association of Australia was formed. It started back in October 1988 because so many people were concerned about the loss of plants, either through nurseries closing down, old gardens changing hands and areas of old homes and gardens being bulldozed for re-development into mega stores or multiple housing units.

Concerns were not only for the loss of plants but the lack of sharing relevant information for the benefit of current enquiries and for posterity. There were (and still are) gardeners and owner/managers of significant plant collections that could help share their knowledge and expertise through the OPCA and to help build a reliable data-base.

This information could range from: what plants were noteworthy for their aesthetic, scientific or historical values, their performance under various site-factors (soil & climate) and the sources from which propagating material can be obtained.

In those days the organization was called the Ornamental Plant Collections of Australia (OPCA) and was officially launched in October of 1988. It started off with four or five plant collections and these were termed 'trial' collections to see how they would perform.

The patron was Dr J.H. Willis and the official public launch was held at the site of the Ornamental Plant Collection of Japanese Flowering Cherries (*Prunus Sato-zakura* Group) at Chandler's Nurseries in The Basin, in the Dandenongs.

One of the earlier collections was the Viburnum collection, registered in 1987 and still housed and maintained by staff in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. Others in existence at the time were Cistus, Clematis, Crocus and Pelargonium. The first one was the Prunus Collection held by John Chandler at the old 'Chandler Gardens', trading then as 'Como Nursery', at The Basin. (In my young days, we knew it as Bert Chandlers 'Como Nursery').

The property was subdivided in 1996 when Pat and George Hetrel bought 15 acres, which included the 6 acres of formal display area of established trees and shrubs. At that time they were unaware that they had also acquired two OPCA registered collections of plants... the Prunus and the Magnolia. They have continued to maintain these collections and open their property, 'Como Gardens' to the public from time to time.

This is a living example of how collections of plants could be lost through the changing of hands with a property, new owners coming in with different ideas might want to clear the area, re structure and re plant with something quite new.

Now the Ornamental Conservation Association of Australia (OPCAA) has to date 61 registered collections throughout Victoria and interstate and a further 12 with provisional registration. There are several collections

of the one genus eg. Rosa, Hydrangea, Lavandula and Salvia. This is a good thing as it demonstrates how these particular collections perform in different locations.

For example the first Salvia collection was registered through the Herb Society of Victoria in August 1993 (see Bill Whitehead's article, this issue) the second collection is up in Albury. The third salvia collection is here in my garden at Gruyere and shows the diversity of species growing in the one area with a minimum of water, this in turn shows the hardiness of so many salvia species.

The OPCA is always on the lookout for more collections and for folk who are willing to assist in a voluntary capacity with fundraising abilities and activities, computer skills, checking on the collections or assistance in the office... anything to help save our plants.

Meg Bentley

Werri Beach NSW

It is hot!!! and I'm in hibernation as far as the garden is concerned. Apart from watering and tidying up nothing else gets done in the garden at this time of the year here. It's so humid that any work is done early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Storms have been a feature of this summer with some hail but thankfully, no damage. The tanks are brimming and most plants are flourishing.

In flower at the moment I have Salvia.'Christine Yeo' which I think might become a favourite. S. 'Harmony' , which I planted amongst some grey plants for contrast, is also looking good. There's also S. 'Indigo Spires', S. 'Margaret Arnold', S.'Phyllis Fancy', *S.discolor*, *S.microphyllas* 'Iced Lemon', 'Sensation' and I think 'Musk Pink' and 'Cyclamen' are all flowering well.

S.'Costa Rican Blue' is a little disappointing in that it never seems to have a lot of flowers at one time. It only spot flowers and you don't get that lovely splash of blue which I have seen in other gardens. The leaves are often brown on the edges and I can't decide whether it's not enough water or whether it's salt burning them.

I'm also a little disappointed in *S.broussonetii* which seems to need a lot of water just to survive and has only had the odd flower. I have moved it twice but maybe it would be happier in yet another spot. A job for autumn. Meanwhile I'd better take some cuttings. I've had some great luck with cuttings and I'm about to launch into seed propagation. I'm taking note of all the advice in the Salvia News and hope for some success now we're almost into February and hopefully some good propagating weather.

I'd like some help in identifying a lovely salvia which I thought might be *S.africana-caerulea*. Does it have flowers which are half white half pale blue? Or could it be *S.chamelaegnea*? It hasn't grown much (about 50cm high) but it is a reliable flowerer in a fairly harsh spot and very pretty.

S.melissadora is a delight with its almost constant flowers. The lime iris which I planted in late 2003 and which were supposed to flower in amongst it have not! However they were only small bulbs and one day will surely deliver the goods.

I bought a few salvias towards the end of last year, some dormant. I planted them all out and they all started growing and one in particular (whose name I can't remember) looked a bit odd for a salvia and it grew and grew and had some lovely pink flowers which I recognised finally as Linaria. The actual salvia did appear and has grown well although needing quite a bit of water where I've placed it but I'll have to wait till it flowers to identify it. Of course Linaria looks nothing like salvia!

Also about to flower is the terrific *S.madrensis* and I'm looking forward to some flowers on a S.'Van Houttii' which I had lost but was given a cutting by a friend. From mid February I'm hoping for a burst of colour as *S.purpurea*, *S.iodantha* and some of my new 'reds' come into their own.

Maureen Cox

SALVIA SEED AVAILABLE

To purchase, send a self addressed envelope & stamp or 2 stamps for more pkts.of seed to

Lyndi Garnett
844 Highbury St
Glen Waverley 3150

S. argentia , *S.mellifera*, *S.pratensis*,*S.haemotodes*, *S. viscosa*, *S.coccinea bicolor*,
S.coccinea 'Lady in Red',*S.plectranthoides*,*S.interrupta*, *S.rugosa*, *S.nemorosa* 'Amythyst'
S. superba 'Tanzarin', *S. superba* 'Rose Queen', *S.greggii* 'Sierra Pink'. *S.greggii* 'Raspberry Royal'.
S. greggii alba, *S.greggii* bicolor.

Salvia News From John Daniels

Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens

With the warmest, driest spring for twenty years extending into a drought of a summer so far, our salvia collection at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens featured an extensive display of *S. sclarea* in the Economic Plant collection. This is the area surrounding Pete's Vegie Patch featured regularly in Gardening Australia on A.B.C television. This salvia grows to 1.8 metres in height and the combination of pink tinged white bracts and bicoloured corolla of lilac hood and white lower lip is a visual delight.

The peak flowering of red *S. gesneraeflora* 'Tequila' and deep blue *S. corrugata* throughout spring finally came to an end. In December, attention was drawn to the densely white flowered inflorescence of *S. argentea*. The silver-haired leaves form an attractive rosette, on top of a waist high sandstone wall, throughout the non-flowering period, but especially during winter and spring. The bright pale blue of *S. patens* 'Cambridge Blue' and mauve *S. patens* 'Chilcombe' are highlighted by their shaded position and their ability to be examined also at waist height. The yellow flowered herbaceous perennial, *S. glutinosa*, has also appreciated its transplanting to a less exposed, moist and shadier position. It has surprisingly sticky, aromatic flower spikes given that its leaves are scentless.

While these species are going to seed, the pink *S. coccinea* 'bicolor' and purplish-red *S. greggii*, possibly 'Raspberry Royal', are still in full bloom with seedlings of the former having emerged densely at last summer's flowering site. *S. sinaloensis* 'Aztec Blue' displays electric blue flowers with purple tinged leaves on a densely vigorous ground cover that certainly seems to have found its niche! This year it has flowered earlier for not having been sheared to the ground in spring.

The background shrub display is comprised of *S. guaranitica*, a two metre tall column topped with deep blue flowers and *S. canariensis* with arching grey leaved stems to 1.8 metres, showing to perfection the burgundy shades of its calyces. The combination of squat, bright pink blooms of *S. involucrata* 'Bethellii' and long dark spikes of *S. 'Indigo Spires'*, provide another point of contrast of colour and form with both approaching 2 metres in height. The latter, with its lax growth and heavy, long spikes are performing to perfection so far without wind or wattle bird damage. Further interest is created by the contrast between the fine leaved and lax habit of perennial *S. azurea* and the sturdy, shrub like, woolly-stemmed *S. leucantha* both of which are beginning to flower at nearly a metre high in late January.

Our bedding displays of *S. farinacea* 'Victoria Blue' and 'Victoria White' from an early November planting of advanced seedlings commenced flowering in mid January and will provide the climax to our summer annual display over the next two months.

Further observations on the relationship between bumble bees and salvia flowers:

- a fascinating highlight over the past month has been bumble bees on *S. transylvanica* where the bees, at least twice the size of the flower, are frantically attracted to the purple blue flower colour, adding to the spectacle;
- bumble bees on *S. guaranitica* are accessing the nectary at the base of the corolla solely on their right side as also evidenced in *S. chiapensis* and some *S. microphylla* and *S. greggii* cultivars

With regard to the supposed sterility of the hybrid *S. 'Indigo Spires'*, accessed as *S. 'Purple Spires'*, I have just collected a number of seeds, around twenty, which is not many, given the number of flowers on the spikes I have dead headed, but their viability will be tested.

More thoughts on Writing and Talking about Salvias

As *Salvia* collectors, we have mostly come to terms with the need for Botanical names, rather than common names, so that we can refer to our plants precisely and consistently. While some regard this as a nuisance, we should be grateful that our forebears established a system for naming plants in a way that can be clearly understood across language and regional barriers. This is probably even more relevant in the 21st century when we can jump on the internet and discuss our beloved *Salvias* with fellow enthusiasts around the world. Of course, we can still get their names wrong, and indeed, a lot of our discussion is about getting them properly identified.

Questions are also asked about correct spelling and pronunciation of these Botanical names. There is an *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* which lays down the rules for the correct writing and spelling of plant names. Sheila Fox wrote a very useful piece in the last newsletter on this subject, so it would be good if we could all follow the rules and make our editor's job a lot easier.

Pronunciation, however, is another matter altogether and it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with which school we went to. Botanical Latin is essentially a written language and there is no general agreement on how it should be pronounced. There are four main systems in the English-speaking countries: (1) the traditional system used by gardeners and botanists, (2) an old academic system of classical Latin, (3) the 'reformed' or 'restored' academic pronunciation adopted by classical scholars as presenting "a reasonably close approximation to the actual sounds of the language as spoken by educated Romans" and (4) the Latin of the Roman Catholic Church, which is based on modern Italian pronunciation. While the 'reformed' system is the most logical to use, the current practice in Australia is to use the traditional English horticultural system. It matters little really as long as we understand each other.

For those wishing to take the trouble, the following rules may help:

- Every vowel should be pronounced, hence *ros-ma-ri-ni-fo-li-a* or *Co-to-ne-as-ter* and *He-be*
- The stress is on the first syllable in words of two syllables, hence *fal-lax*, and in words of three or more syllables, the stress is generally (but not always!) on the penultimate syllable, hence *syl-ves-tris*, *af-ri-ca-na*. (What about *Cal-lis-te-mon*??)
- Pronunciation according to the traditional system is as follows:

a	Short as in cat or long as in rather	ae	As in seat
au	As in shawl	c	Hard before a, o, u as in cat Soft before e, i, y as in ceiling
ch	As in cat	e	Short as in set or long as in meet
ei	As in height	g	Same rule as for c
i	Short as in tin or long as in fine	j	As in jet (except where a name is based on a person's name or place name as in <i>jamensis</i> , when we say <i>Hamensis</i> , as pronounced in Mexico)
o	Short as in pot or long as in vote	oe	As in see
ph	As f	s	As in this, not those
u	As in rub	ui	As in ruin

I hope this is helpful, even though it doesn't tell you when something is pronounced as short or long.

Now, for those of you who wonder why some people write *S. gesneraeflora* and others write *S. gesneriflora*, and the same with *S. cacalaeifolia/cacaliifolia* and others, there is an answer and there is one correct way based on the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature. So watch out for an article in the next newsletter called, "Stems and Roots and Latin".

Pat Anderson

The Trials of Identification

Having a plant collection is not as glamorous as it might sound to non-collectors and going through the process of checking the correct plant species can be quite trying. Identification of salvias can be quite a difficult process at the best of times or sending specimens overseas to be identified is an even slower process. When there are no known salvias originating in Australia, most of the relevant information has to come here via institutions and Botanic Gardens from overseas or studying books on Lamiaceae within the botanical floras. I guess things can be made much quicker through the email but I am not connected to the internet as yet, besides... sometimes one needs to actually see the specimen in question to make a positive identification!

In recent months I have been checking out several salvia species, these being *S. namaensis*, *S. runcinata*, *S. stenophylla* and *S. aurita* var *galpinii*, all from Southern Africa.

Salvia namaensis has been going by the name of *S. runcinata*, since that was the name of this species when it came into the country many years ago and until recently, the Salvia Study Group of Victoria and everyone else who had acquired this species at that time had also been calling it *S. runcinata*.

After many years, the proper name has been given to this species as *Salvia namaensis*, now to sort out which is the correct *Salvia runcinata*.

A friend acquired seed of 'so called' *S. runcinata* and gave me a few seedlings to check them out, the young plants did look quite different to the previous species of *S. namaensis* but on closer inspection they started to resemble another salvia... that of *S. stenophylla*.

Studying the Flora of Southern Africa and Notes From The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh . Vol XXX111 No.1. 1974 ...A Revision of Salvia in Africa, reveals that this species (*S. runcinata*) has close links with *S. stenophylla* and that of *S. repens* but lacks the creeping rootstock of *S. repens*.

Salvia stenophylla is probably the closest ally of *S. runcinata* and can usually be distinguished by the narrower leaves with narrower segments and almost glabrous stems but some specimens are difficult to place. It is probable that hybridization has contributed to the confusion but field-work would have to be carried out in areas where one species overlaps with another.

Looking through the microscope and illustrating each species as they flower does give an idea of what you are up against when trying to identify plant species, the next job will be to press plant specimens and send overseas for a correct identification... hopefully!

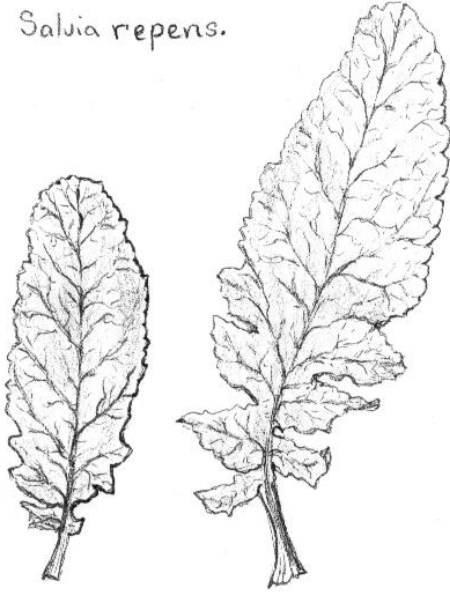
The illustrations I have made on these few pages are exact replicas of the plants growing in my garden, they show a young leaf and an older leaf and give a great example of the similarity of leaves and how confusing these plants can be if one goes by leaf alone, especially in this case with the Southern African salvias.

[**Salvia leaves: a. *S. repens.*, b. *S. aurita* var *galpinii.*, c. *S. scabra.*,
d. *S. nilotica.*, e. *S. namaensis.*, f. *S. stenophylla.*, g. *S. runcinata.*]**

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Meg Bentley

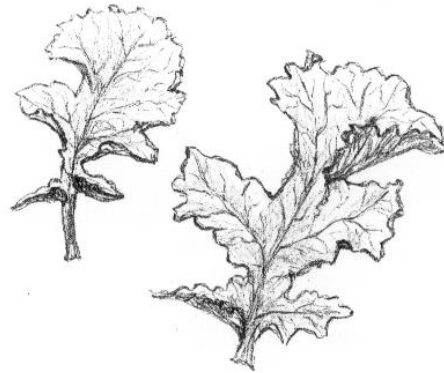
a *Salvia repens*.



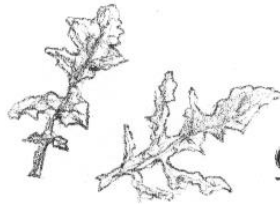
b
Salvia aurita
var *galpinii*.



d
salvia nilotica.



c
Salvia scabra.



e *Salvia namaensis*.



f. *Salvia stenophylla*



g.
Salvia runcinata (?)

Lemon Tree Cottage

As most people know Leon and I have the luxury of mains water, but with restrictions and water prices rising, we have become tough on our plants. Meaning up until the last lot of torrential rain the garden only got watered once. And that was because the hydrangeas were quite limp. I've pampered the plants far too long and they can survive without me. Of the salvias I have, those I would rate the hardiest are; *Salvia karwinskii*, *S. chiapensis*, *S. 'Hot Lips'*, all the *S. greggii* and the *S. microphylla*, *S. scabra*, *S. cacaliaefolia*, *S. 'Christine Yeo'*, *S. 'Margaret Arnold'*, *S. grahami 'Purple'*, *S. polystachya* (one I hadn't expected to do so well without water), *S. coahuilensis*, *S. melissadora*, *S. urica*, *S. involucrata 'Joan'*, *S. 'Cookie'*, *S. spathacea*, *S. africana lutea*, *S. lanceolata* and many more. I have two *S. involucrata 'Bethellii'* one on the nature strip in between the power pole and a wild plum tree doesn't do well, I think the plum takes all the water, the other one out the back does much better, no competition other than a few perennials. These are such drought tolerant plants. I am so amazed how well they do.

Mid-winter I cut a *S. chiapensis* to the ground, a very large plant with a mature base protruding from the ground. It was chopped down to this root to about 4 inches, two weeks later, I thought, I've killed it but I could see a faint bit of green "moss" on the root ball and a few weeks later I looked closely with my glasses on and I realized there were new shoots coming up. It was absolutely amazing. Now that plant is a metre high in only 5 months. Salvias are such incredible plants. *S. agnes* didn't get pruned back and it stayed in flower all winter and spring, and is still in flower as I write in February. *S. lavanduloides* did the same. Has anyone else had this experience? Time to invest in some more salvias.

Happy salvia gardening. *Elly Roos*

Boronia News

Space is at a premium on this smallish suburban plot that 5 years ago sported over 20 trees, mostly natives, and all planted when the house was built. Thigh high grass plus lots of black plastic and red scoria, even the leaf litter, the 'pot making' yellow clay, common sense rather than an emotional attitude to trees long past their best, made it easy to cull a few and winds helped more trees to fall over. Sorry all you purists.

In the past my gardens both huge and large have been filled with anything that would perform without water or attention. Experience has taught that Heritage roses are the most obliging of all, capable of filling very large areas with a maximum reward. Now though, I've discovered salvias so on this limited patch the spaces are delightfully fought for between the two with the winter bonus shows from the salvias. Bulbs and perennials keep the ground virtually weed free.

There are no annuals making spectacular displays here although limited formality and a real attempt at color coordination is practiced—often unsuccessfully.

Hope you discover some 'gems' and enjoy my garden when you come it July.

Laurelle Willis

The White *Salvia forskaohlei*

Salvia forskaohlei alba was brought into Australia by Judi Forrester of Otway Herbs from Italy in 2001. She says that it comes true as long as it is not planted beside the blue/ purples. It has a lighter coloration in all its parts. Judi's address is Otway Herbs 155 Biddells Rd Apollo Bay 3233 Victoria Australia Ph 035237 6318 email otwayherbs@bigpond.com.au.

Several members of the Salvia Study Group are growing it with delight. A good, white plant is such a pleasure in the garden. If it grows as obligingly as my original *S. forskaohlei*, bought from Lambley Nursery in about 1990 I will be pleased. I will isolate it from the others so hope to have seed. *Trudi Fry*

SALVIA FORUM

1. In the Sept 2004 issue:

Bill Whitehead asked if anyone has *Salvia officinalis* Alba.

I have/had 2 plants, the sum total from a whole packet of seed purchased from Plant World Seeds in the UK. However, only last week, one plant died suddenly. I have taken cuttings from the other and I'm crossing my fingers. Mind you, it hasn't flowered yet so I'm not 100% certain that I have the real thing.

Does anyone else have this plant?

Can anyone advise on the best way of avoiding sudden death in *S. officinalis* and similar species. I also lost my 2 plants of 'Rosea' and a very small *S. blancoana* recently, and over the past few months, I have lost a few plants of *S. officinalis purpurescens*. These plants are in the same area, in thin, dry soil. Meg reported in the March 2004 edition that overhead watering of grey-leaved plants in dry soil could cause problems. This might be my error because they were watered this way recently, albeit only once. I have had *purpurescens* in a different place where it gets a lot of overhead watering (our back lawn fire break area) for several years, but I suppose this plant is more accustomed to such treatment.

Any other experiences of maintaining grey-leaved sages please?

Trudi wrote about a Yates' product called "Stressguard".

This product is designed to reduce transpiration and assist plants during exposure to stressful conditions such as transplant shock, frost, drought, heat and drying winds.

Jane from Stratford has had success with it. Has anyone else tried it? If so, for what conditions, on which plants and with what degree of success?

John Daniels at the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens reported on the habit of bumble bees, incising the base of the corolla tube of some *Salvia* species to collect nectar. While we don't have bumble bees in Victoria (yet), I have observed honey bees and bee flies doing this to various forms of *S. microphylla* and *S. greggii*. In addition, while collecting seed from my *S. africana lutea*, I have noticed the same puncture marks through the calyx, but thankfully there are still some with seed. My conclusion is that nectar collection by this means doesn't rule out fertilization.

Has anyone else observed this activity by insects or birds? If so, with what species and with what results?

2. New questions

Salvia atrocyanea. The only plants I have seen are tall and lanky with very few stems and their unusual flowers and bracts confined to the tips of these stems. In a foolish fit, I recently cut back 1 of the 2 stems of my, new-this-year plant, to encourage some bushing out. I should have known better. Have I cut out my only hope of this stem flowering this summer? If this plant dies down in winter, how is it best managed to induce more flowering stems?

(I discovered that my *S. atrocyanea* had a tuber similar to *S. guaranitica* when transferring it to terracotta pot. There was also a 'sucker' which I cut off and potted. There are 3 stems on the old one all with buds. *Trudi*)

Salvia 'Violet Eyes'. This is a hybrid that arose in Meg's garden. In my garden, my plant has assumed a very upright habit of about 2 m, with nice purple flowers, green calices, and sterile. But, the leaves seem very susceptible to something causing brown splodges. Any comments anyone?

Pat Anderson

Stratford News

After spending Christmas in Perth with family and then shearing on our return and hay cutting/baling etc, January went very quickly for me. So to give you an update; on the salvias that I planted last May and put a very small handful of water crystals into each hole, and remember they all pushed themselves out of ground next day? Remember that!! Well they survived me re-planting them and now are quite big bushes and madly flowering. They never looked back after that ordeal. In the new area I made, I have put mostly penstemons and salvias in and now they are flowering and the whole garden bed looks magnificent, even if I say so myself. I so enjoy going on garden walks everyday to see what's new and flowering.

As we live on a farm and the new garden area is part of the horse paddock, Chris my husband is going to put post/ rail fence up to stop any cattle or horses etc eating those salvias but I keep extending the bed out, so by the time he gets to build it, I may have taken over the whole paddock!

Coming to this side of Melbourne on 5&6th March for the first time is a rare plant fair with over 40 stall holders. In 2003 I went to Mt Macedon rare plant fair and they had 18 stall holders. I know I will see new release salvias there. It is being held at The Garden Vineyard in Moorooduc. They have a magnificent garden and salvias planted in their perennial borders too, so any of you, it is worth a trip that w/end to visit under OGS.

That is all salvia lovers till next newsletter. *Jane Lee*

Terracotta Gardening

Difficulties with an old back injury (done when it was a young back!) meant that I was too late to plant. The back is responding to treatment and I have converted to terracotta pots to keep my unplanted treasures until autumn. The terracotta pots are working well. Because they are slightly porous they keep the roots wonderfully cool acting as an evaporative cooler, like a Coolgardie safe. I soak the pots before planting and then again after the soil and plants go in. The area I have had to use for the tiers of pots is in front of a wall hiding the tanks. It is rather exposed to all the elements and in full sun for half the day. Plastic pots in this situation boil the roots when water is added. I have bought terracotta pots from Northcote Pottery and scrounged more from where ever I can. The unglazed ones are the ones needed and if you have even a few old unwanted ones over 8", cracked or chipped even, I'll happily exchange them for Salvias. This is proving to not only be a great way of preserving my treasures but it also is a great display of salvia flowers and being adjacent to the poly house a handy source of cutting material. There are over 100 now all taking to pot culture, some with surprise no doubt, but even tall ones such as *Salvia confertifolia* are flowering. I find that I water less than with plastic. **Trudi Fry**

The Advantages of Northcote Pottery Terracotta Pots

1. The ability of the pot to breathe i.e. allows for the transfer of gases through the pot to release excess oxygen and therefore keep a healthy root system
2. Terracotta enables excess water to pass out through the pot walls avoiding water logging after heavy rain
3. Terracotta maintains a natural pH providing an ideal environment for the plants in the container (pH is the alkalinity or acidity of the soil. Every plant prefers a different pH level which dictates which nutrients are available in the soil. Terracotta pots will not interfere with the pH requirements for different plants)
4. Terracotta pottery is non-toxic and this, coupled with the low environmental impact terracotta pot manufacturing makes in comparison with manufacturing plastic pots makes terracotta an ideal gardening product for those who are environmentally responsible
5. The natural appeal of terracotta clay and its ability to weather naturally and aesthetically.
6. Longevity. Terracotta pots can last for centuries!

Does a terracotta garden pot need a saucer or pot-feet underneath?

A. The ideal growing situation is to have pot feet in winter to aid with drainage, and a saucer under the pots in summer to retain moisture so watering does not need to be as frequent. However, having pot-feet under a saucer will enable easy cleaning between the pot and the ground, allow spilt water to evaporate from under the pot (particularly important when on wooden surfaces or carpet), and enhance the pot giving it a more elegant 'look'.

Q Do terracotta pots dry out, and does the inside of the pot need sealing?

A. Terracotta is porous, but no it does not necessarily need sealing. In the initial period after planting, a small amount of extra drying may be noticed, but this will soon slow as the pore spaces in the clay become blocked with fine soil particles or soluble salts. The porosity of terracotta is advantageous in that it allows for the transfer of gas through the pot wall, releasing excess oxygen, and allowing excess water to escape after heavy rain.

Q. What type of soil should I use in terracotta pots?

A. As with any container grown plant, always use a good quality potting mix. Normal garden soil soon becomes compacted creating very poor drainage, and little water holding capacity or space for aeration. Good quality potting mix is created so that there is very little change in the nature of the potting mixture over time. We recommend Debco potting mixes. Only Debco Terracotta and Tub Mix has ingredients that professional nursery growers use: Saturaid for wetter soil Water storing granules High performance plant food

Terracotta pots are made from clay which is formed from the erosion of rocks washed down rivers from mountainous areas. On the journey, the clay picks up metallic particles (ie. red iron) which give the clay its rich, earthy orange colour when fired. Northcote Pottery collects this clay and mixes it with other clays to give the Northcote Pottery terracotta pots more strength, while keeping the beauty of the rich red terracotta. The dry clay is crushed and combined with water so it can be formed into pots. This wet clay is cut into pieces of the correct size for the making of different shaped and sized pots. Some pots are made on machines (presses) which press clay into a predetermined shape between two metal dyes. Other pots are traditionally made by hand by skilled potters on the electric potting wheel. After the clay has been shaped into a pot it must dry out before being fired at 1000-1050°C. Firing bonds the clay particles together making it strong and no longer soluble in water. When the pot cools, it can begin its life as a plant container. There is no reason why a pot made in this way will not last forever!

I have taken the above from a Northcote Pottery information sheet with their permission. Editor.

The Salvia Growers Manual, is priced at \$30 per copy or mailing cost of \$2.50 for post & packing. The supplement is now available, full of photos and illustrations. This retails at a higher cost than expected due to the cost of color printing. The price is \$48.00 but can be ordered with the Manual as a complete book for \$65. Copies can be obtained direct from Meg. 03 5964 9372 or Mobile 0431 240 971 or contact Lyndi ph.03 9803 4534
Also on sale at the Salvia stand at the Rose Show..

SE Queensland Salvia News - 5/2/05

The weather at the moment is not conducive to gardening! I have just returned from 8 days in Tasmania with a group of friends from the 'Poppies' – a thoroughly enjoyable trip that included many visits to gardens. We saw wonderful cold climate plants that we yearn to grow and of course all returned armed with plants that will probably die when next we have a deluge and high humidity – we are collectors though and have to give them a try! I was surprised how few salvias I saw until arriving at the Hobart Botanic Gardens where I was able to make contact with John Daniels who has developed a salvia collection in the gardens.

Whilst in Hobart I bought a plant incorrectly labeled *Salvia karwinskii* - a grey leaf with orange flowers in whorls. It will be interesting to see what it turns out to be!

We are opening our garden with AOGS on 9/10 April so December and early January were spent pruning and mulching – a difficult job in the heat we have experienced. I pruned *S. 'Phyllis Fancy'* hard and she has come away beautifully. Others like the *S. greggii* and *S. microphyllas* didn't fare so well – no losses but I did have some die-back. *S. microphylla* 'San Carlos Festival' is a top plant for us – thrives in high humidity and extreme heat.

We have learnt in this climate to prune carefully in the hot humid weather – taking the bottom part of the plant only and waiting for it to regrow before taking the top out of it, has been most successful. *S. 'Marine Blue'* did not fare so well with hard pruning so I'll have to replant that. *S. 'Anthony Parker'* was also due for a hard cut – hopefully it will be in full bloom in early April. I was quite ruthless with the winter flowerers – at this time of year they climb to the sky and need a hard cut back. *S. 'Joan'* had quite a haircut and is storming away again – super plant that is rarely without a flower. *S. muirri*, *S. chiapensis* and *S. leucantha* would have to be some of the best performers at this time of year. *S. melissadora*, *S. mexicana* 'lime bracts', *S. 'Waverly'* and all the 'Navajo' range are also thriving in the high humidity.

Wanda Hirth tells me that a friend of hers has been growing *S. guaranitica* 'Argentine Skies' in a pedestal pot and it looks stunning – a great way to control a beautiful plant! I think I will try this with *S. 'Black and Blue'* which we are finding travels very quickly much like *S. guaranitica*. *S. uliginosa* would be a suitable plant also.

Barb Wickes Perennial Poppies Group

This Month's SALVIA SPECIALS

The group now has sufficient quantities of these plants available from either

Lyndi ph 9803 4534 Glen Waverly or Jillian ph 9756 6361 The Patch

Salvia Phyllis Fancy, S. arizonica, S. disjuncta, S. oppositifolia, S. agnes, S. Chiapsis mts. S. polystachys.

To members, price is \$3 .

Forum

Maureen Cox asked for help identifying a plant which has flowers that are half white and half pale blue, about 50cm high, very pretty and a reliable flowerer in a fairly harsh spot.

It certainly sounds as if it could be one of the South African salvias. Sounds like *S. africana caerulea*, but here are some pointers which might help with identification:

	<i>S.africana caerulea</i>	<i>S. chamelaeagnea</i>	<i>S. muiirii</i>
Flower	Upper lip mauve/pale blue, arched and covered in hairs. Lower lip very pale, almost white. Flowers (2cms) single or in pairs, on the flowering stems	Upper lip a light mauve/blue and more arched, lower lip white. Flowers (2.5cm) crowded on tips of many branched stems, subtended by short stems.	Small, bluey mauve, with white throat. Upper lip short and straight, lower lip wider
Flowering time	Most of the year (in Warrandyte)	From Feb	Most of the year
Calyx	Green, tinged with purple, hairy and campanulate – large and almost square when looked at end on after flower has dropped off	Green and purplish, lower lip with 2 sharp points	green
Leaves	On flowering stems, grey green, very narrow, 2 cm x 6mm, finely toothed, young leaves more rounded	Mid green, about 3cm x 1cm and more toothed	Small, about 2cm x 0.5cm, thick and slightly folded. Young leaves dentate
Plant height & width	approx 0.5m x 0.5m	Approx 1m x 1.5m	Approx 0.5m x 0.5m
Growth habit	Compact shrub	Sends out many stems from the rootstock and tends to flop a bit	Compact shrub

Maureen also asked about the condition of her *S. 'Costa Rican Blue'*.

Where is it placed Maureen? The brown edges could be salt burn if it is planted where salt spray will affect it, but what about your other leafy salvias? Do they show the same symptoms? This plant appears to enjoy some afternoon shade, as so many of the larger-leaved ones. It should flower more profusely in the right conditions. Maybe it is too hot and exposed?

Yes, it's yet another big word.

Cleistogamy is the production of flowers that don't open to expose the reproductive organs, which prevents cross pollination. This happens to some plants all the time, but in others, it only happens under certain climatic conditions. In spite of not opening, the plant is programmed to be able to pollinate itself and can therefore set seeds.

Salvia lyrata seems to flower in the spring and then as the season advances, the flowers don't appear to open. At least that is my observation, but I have only had the plant since last winter. It is a prolific seeder so I assume its mechanism helps to ensure its weedy nature.

Apparently most viola species are the same - ie they produce cleistogamous flowers in the summer when temperatures are high, whereas earlier flowers are 'chasmogamous'.

The evolutionary origin of this mechanism is not known - according to my Dictionary of Plant Sciences!

Does that help? **Pat Anderson**

