

# SALVIA NEWS

SUMMER 2008 NO.31



Official Newsletter of the  
**Victorian Salvia Study Group**  
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### THE SALVIA DISPLAY GARDEN FRIENDS GROUP

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**THE PURPOSE OF THE SALVIA STUDY GROUP IS TO GROW AND COLLECT SALVIAS FOR STUDY AND RESEARCH**

#### GROUP AIMS

- To encourage the study and growth of salvias
- To assist with the planting and maintenance of the registered OPCA collections at Hampton & 'Nobelius' in Emerald
- To exchange and gather cuttings, seeds and information with other members and similar study groups
- To collect & propagate plants for private & registered collections
- To correctly identify and name existing & any new salvias

#### **GATHERINGS HELD REGULARLY**

**DETAILS OF VENUES AND DATES PUBLISHED IN SALVIA NEWS**

*The views expressed by the contributors of this publication are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Salvia Study Group. While every effort is made to publish reliable information, the use of that information is at the discretion of the individual. The Herb Society of Victoria Inc takes no responsibility for statements made or opinions expressed and does not offer treatment or advice.*



# Salvia News

Victorian Salvia Study Group

A Branch of the Herb Society of Victoria

Number 31

SUMMER 2008

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*I have several new tools. The latest is an insect proof hatcover reaching halfway down my chest infuriating flies and mosquitos. The next is a bargain adjustable fan from Bunnings to cope with the hot humid conditions in the polyhouse. And, of course, my new laptop computer which is a challenge. However in a millennium or so I will know how it works and that will be lovely. This weather is fantastic for striking cuttings. I have never had such instant results. When I read news from you coping and even enjoying such diverse weather, I realize what interesting lives we all live, made even more interesting through our interest in salvias. The flood damage to the wonderful Rathdowney garden in SEQ saddened me. I spoke there in June 07 and it is imprinted on my memory as a special place.*

*Note new email address. Please send your articles in by 25th April as I will go to SEQ in June.*

*An amazing amount of people find what you write of great value and so do I. Thank you.*

*May we all have a lovely 2008.*

## SALVIA CALENDAR

**MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup> 9<sup>TH</sup> 10<sup>TH</sup> PAT & JOHN ANDERSON'S OPEN GARDEN  
WONDERFUL SALVIAS, NATIVES, HERBS  
98 BRADLEYS LANE, WARRANDYTE  
MEL:23 – B12. 10 a.m. – p.m.  
PLANTS FOR SALE**

**MARCH SAT/SUN 1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> – BOLOBEK PLANT FAIR. 10a.m. – 4.30p.m.  
MT MACEDON RD, MACEDON  
MEL: 609 – G10. FREE PARKING, \$ 10.00 ENTRY**

**MARCH SUN. 16<sup>TH</sup> KURANGA NATIVE NURSERY. 11.30 a.m  
FEAST FOR THE EYES, LOTS OF TREATS  
GREAT CAFÉ AND GIFT SHOP  
118 YORK RD, MT EVELYN  
MEL: 52 – K ¼**

**AUGUST SAT 2<sup>ND</sup> PAKENHAM GARDEN CLUB EXPO  
PAKENHAM RACECOURSE  
PAKENHAM MEL: 316 C2  
PLANTS FOR SALE**

**OCTOBER SAT/SUN 18,19<sup>TH</sup> : BAW BAW ( WARRIGAL) GARDEN EXPO  
LARDNER PARK WARRIGAL  
PLANTS FOR SALE  
MEL: 612 U8**

**ANY QUERIES : PLEASE RING Lyndi Garnett Ph 9803 4534**

## GEELONG GLEANINGS CONTINUED

As I write in mid- January, I am aware that the editor needs articles from fellow salvia growers to learn how we and our salvias are. In the Geelong region, we've just endured at least four days with temperatures over 40 degrees. This together with restricted watering, may not appear advantageous for growing salvias. However I confine myself these days to only growing the larger salvia plants. This assures me I have the minimum trouble. The following plants have been in my garden more than 15 years, and have given me much enjoyment.

*Salvia apiana* indigenous to California, also known as white or bee sage and well-known to American Indians in that region and used in their ceremonies. Its leaves contain aromatic oils and resins and are heavily scented when used either fresh or dried. The plants specific epithet derives from its use by bee-keepers in the production of honey. I consider this plant with its greyish -white perennial leaves to be the toughest and best of the salvias. It is 1½ metres in height and has just finished flowering. These long stems are now bearing copious pods of ripening seeds. It is located in full sun and receives little or no water.

*Salvia mellifera* is also indigenous to California and in Betsy Clebsh book is called black sage. This common name surprises me as no part of the plant shows a black colour. It, like apiana, is a bee sage as its specific epithet indicates. The smallish mid-green leaves, with indented veins, give the plant a textured appearance. The flower structure is quite different to apiana whose flowers are individually separate along its stems. The small flowers of mellifera grow in tight whorls along each flower stem. One plant has flowers of pure white whilst another has flowers with traces of pink. They finished flowering about a month ago and the whorls still remain on the plant bearing copious seed.

*Salvia leucophylla* is indigenous to Southern California and called purple or grey sage. These names refer firstly to the flower colour and secondly to the leaf colour. Its specific epithet however relates entirely to the colour of its whitish leaves. It frequently grows amongst the apiana and mellifera species in their wild habitat. In my garden it is about one metre in height. It has a fairly close habit of growth with the uppermost branches drooping gracefully downwards. I find its flower structure very similar to mellifera growing in tight whorls around the stem. Flowering also ceased about one month ago with the remaining whorls still on the bush with seeds waiting to be removed. Again this plant is very easy to care for and lives happily in my dry garden.

*Salvia canariensis* is indigenous to the Canary Islands. In my garden, in an open position, it has grown hugely to a height of 2 metres. It also has just finished flowering, with its violet coloured flowers tightly clustered along its stems. The arrowhead shaped leaves are covered underneath with tiny white hairs. In my garden it gets little or no water. I now intend to prune it down to within about 30cms.of the ground. I may leave the centre somewhat taller.

Bill Whitehead

(the persistent colourful calyces last for ages like a soft purple cloud.)

### WERRI BEACH NSW South Coast NSW

I was a bit concerned that because we'd had so much rain, the garden would not cope later without it. Luckily, after the original 10 or so inches that fell, we've had some 'top-ups' from storms (28mls in the last two days) and I've only had to resort to the tanks during one dry period after Christmas.

Hence, the garden is flourishing, despite some strong northerly winds which do their best to dry out and burn the leaves of some plants. Most of the salvias cope, although I do have to snip off burnt leaves regularly to improve their appearance. *S.dorisiiana* doesn't cope very well, however, so I may have to give up on it or maybe try it in a pot where I can keep an eye on it. I almost killed off a *S.chamelaegnea* growing nearby from overwatering trying to keep *S.dorisiiana* going.

Salvia 'Elegans Purple' in the footpath garden has black edges on nearly all of its leaves from the salt laden winds but if I cut them off it usually comes good. It's pretty tough as it only gets rain water out there.

I've had to move *S.lyrata* and another plant which I think is a salvia grown from a piece but as yet unidentified as it hasn't flowered. When I first planted them, I thought they would have enough sun but everything around them has grown and shaded them out. I've put both in pots to revive and will re-plant in a better spot in autumn.

I'm really pleased with my second attempt at *S.canariensis*, a gift from a friend. I put it down the bottom of the garden and left it to its own devices and it's flowered for ages and is quite sizeable. I'm also excited that one salvia, out of all those I tried from seed, looks like it will succeed. I haven't a clue what it is until it flowers as the labels all blew away.

The most vigorous salvias I have are, of course, the Bog Sage *S. uliginosa*, a lolly pink greggii, yellow *S.madrensis*, *S. 'Anthony Parker'* and *S.guaranitica*. Even though all were cut back and, in the case of bog sage and *S.madrensis*, 'removed' entirely, they have snuck back and before you know it, have taken over again.

I have a new favourite but I don't know what it's called as I lost the tag. I bought it locally and it may be *S.tingitana*. It has the most beautiful darkish green, almost oak like, leaves. It seems to be a small grower with white flowers only at the end of each stem. It dries out quickly and I almost lost it but I've put it in a pot and water it regularly. The white flowers stand out well against the green leaves.

At this time of the year I'm really looking forward to autumn as I think it's the best time here for the salvias. If we keep getting this regular rain they will be looking a picture. Time to think about adding some more to the garden. There's always room for one more! Maureen Cox

### Notes From Gruyere. December 2007

As I write this article I can hear the soft patter of raindrops on the roof...what joy!

This past year has brought about many changes in our lives, one way or another and consequently, the garden was forced to take a back step so to speak.

It is rather interesting to see the development of a garden when left to its own devices.

Letting the garden go gives one the chance to view plants from a different perspective, I guess in a way we all try and manipulate the plants to perform in the way we want instead of actually letting them grow the way they want to.

One interesting observation was how fast and tall the weeds grew and the taller they grew the more they protected some of the salvias.

This made me think of plants growing in their native habitat which can be anything from dense scrub, forest verges, open pastures or weedy roadsides. Sometimes plants find comfort in close proximity to other plants where roots are protected and shaded from hot sun and the foliage and stems are supported against strong winds.

Have you ever noticed when you start clearing around the 'chosen' plant, fussing about and pulling weeds, that the plant can sometimes just up and die?

It all seems quite feasible to me to let the plants do their own thing, the only thing was, I couldn't stand the sight of so many weeds with their seed heads about to drop and promptly set about to remove them.

There are now quite a few changes in our gardens with the latest construction being the 'Pomarium'. You may well ask, what is a 'Pomarium'?

According to 'The Oxford Companion To Gardens', Pomarium, from the classical Latin *pomus*, a fruit-tree; is an orchard planted for utilitarian reasons.

While 'pome' can refer to apples and pears, our 'caged' garden not only grows fruit trees of the Rosaceae family but also includes *Fragaria*, *Ribes*, *Vaccinium*, *Morus* & *Rosa*.

Over the years our fruit trees had all died due to the damage, one way or another, from the many possums that just love our garden and all that it contains, so this wonderfully huge construction was built to house fruit trees and bushes. Passionfruit, strawberries, vegetables, a few herbs and a couple of rose bushes add to the delight of this garden.

Salvias of course have not been forgotten, there is a colourful bed just at the entrance. The added bonus was to see small honeyeaters fly in and out through the wire mesh.

The rest of the salvia gardens have had little nips and tucks here and there, some areas have been changed around after a few losses due to bad weather but I guess everyone goes through all sorts of mishaps... it is what keeps the gardens going and us on our toes.

Meg Bentley.

## GLENROWAN NEWS

Summer in my part of north east Victoria could be compared to the hot wind in Hades (so I will know what I am in for when I fall off my perch). Watching the rain tumble down in Albury and further south around Euroa, I was thinking that we may have offended the weather Gods because we had no relief. Then early new year we had an amazing 43 mls. mostly in an hour, but it was like "Heaven on a stick", as the young folks would say.

We had a follow up of another 12 mls. the following week, so at least the tanks were almost filled. We were then treated to a couple of 46 & 47 degree days, but, on Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> we had in excess of 50 degrees. On that particular day some nice succulents boiled in their skins and are now black stumps. I will leave them there to see what autumn brings.

The same day said goodbye to my cucumbers, dwarf beans, and the tomatoes are struggling. Don't know if the heat has addled my brain, but instead of cursing with frustration at the disasters, it is ho hum – what has died today. Oh well, what can I plant as an alternative in autumn. Perhaps I have just lost the plot. We have no lawn, instead we have the native lippia ground cover, which survives and is so hardy it will even climb over rocks. Still needs the occasional sprinkle, but it is nice to have some green near the house to keep the dust down. My salvias are growing as follows.....

*Salvia canariensis* and *Salvia africana lutea* (brown colour) – grown in pure granitic soil which hardens to rock, cow manure in winter, mulched, never watered – flowered beautifully, looking crisp at the moment, but will shine again in autumn.

*Salvia* 'Margaret Arnold' – in good soil but not watered, doing well.

*Salvia* 'Indigo Spires' – good soil, no water...droopy but surviving.

*Salvia mexicana* 'Limelight' – good soil, no water, self seeded everywhere this year...drooping but surviving.

S. 'Purple Majesty', S. 'Black Knight', S. 'Costa Rica Blue', S. 'Anthony Parker' – all in good soil, the watered ones are holding their own, the ones in dry soil are struggling.

S. 'Phyllis Fancy', S. 'Waverly' in good soil are doing well with a little water.

S. 'Black and Blue' needs water all the time and is in flower.

*S.involucrata* 'Joan' needs some water to survive, but rewards when autumn comes.

*S. splendens* 'Van Houtii' is in a sheltered spot in good soil, but needs water.

When the autumn break arrives the reward in flowers is wonderful. I have quite a few grevillias in the garden and the honeyeaters claim them as their own, chasing the eastern spinebills away. As the spinebills prefer the salvia blooms, I am making a garden on the opposite side of the house with mass plantings of salvia just for them, to have the pleasure of flowers and birds.

Some of my losses include 6 liquidambers 20 ft. tall, a flowering cherry, Cherry laurel (don't tell me they are indestructible!!), proteas, banksias, to name a few.

The ones which thrive are gleditsias, hibiscus, Russian sage, portulacas, and the glorious Mexican blood vine, the vitus ornamental grape vine, although I lost two potato vines (would you believe that!!).

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>. December each year (the longest day) I always say whoopee!! We are on our way to winter, and kid myself summer will be short and cool. Have to keep positive or I will "crash and burn". Hope everyone else is experiencing a less harsh summer, with gardens thriving. May 2008 bring much rain.

**Jess Kay, Glenrowan**

**Salvia Name f**

only afternoon winter sun were in full bloom by early winter and pruned in early October as the new grey foliage emerged. Those specimens with a northerly aspect and all day sun, however, are currently so loaded with the weight of their 15cm long, dense inflorescences, produced simultaneously on all laterals as well as from leaf axils, that their 3m long stems have lowered to a horizontal angle to below 2m. Propagated at the same time and planted similarly, the latter has flowered a full six months later.

Other highlights of the display include the perpetually flowering *Salvia* 'Costa Rican Blue' and the massed flowering of *S. fruticosa* 'Greek Skies' completed by mid- November. A sight seen for the first time on *Salvia gesneraeflora* was that of a single Rosella plucking the corollas and apparently drinking the nectar from the base by shuffling it horizontally through the beak.

John Daniels  
john-daniels@bigpond.com

**Cultivar Name Derivation:** Named by Arja Toivanen and Pat Anderson after the property where it occurred

**Of the address:** 195 Church Road, Pantom Hill, Victoria. In the year 2006

**Origin:** Chance seedling in the garden of the above address. Likely parentage is *Salvia namaensis* ( the seedling arose close to an existing plant) and *Salvia africana caerulea* (another African *Salvia* in close proximity). In some respects, such as the calyx shape after maturity, there is a resemblance to *Salvia muirii*, but the nearest plant was at least 200m away.

**Has this new name been listed in a dated nursery catalogue?** Not yet, but will shortly be included on the list circulated by the Victorian *Salvia* Study Group ( a branch of the Herb Society of Victoria)

**Other Comments:** The hardiness of this plant, both to drought and frost, will make this a very useful addition for gardens in dry areas, especially as it flowers for most of the year, with much larger flowers than its likely parent, *Salvia namaensis*.

Fig 1: *Salvia* 'Finn Grove' at Warrandyte

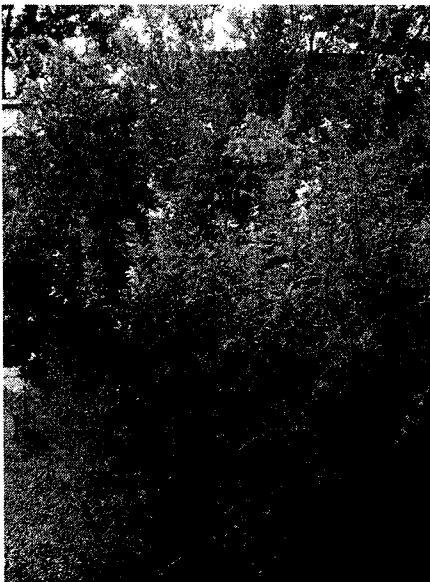


Fig. 2 Close up of *Salvia* 'Finn Grove'



**Description:** Small, upright, compact, woody sub shrub. Height 60 – 80mm, Width 40 – 60mm

**Growing conditions/hardiness:** Frost hardy to at least -3°C. Drought hardy. At its place of origin as a natural hybrid, it is located on an exposed, unwatered clay bank. In lush conditions with improved soil, it grows a bit larger.

**FOLIAGE:**

**Leaf shape:** Oblong to elliptic, runcinate

**Leaf size:** 10 – 15mm x 3 – 5mm (Juvenile leaves of seedlings are up to 40mm x 20mm)

**Leaf colour:** mid green

**Leaf surface:** rugose to bullate, scabrous (minute short hairs)

**Shape of apex:** obtuse

**Shape of base:** auriculate

**Margins:** irregularly dentate to crenate

**Other comments:** leaves subtended by short petioles to 3mm, opposite and decussate

## **FLOWERS**

**Corolla size:** 15 – 20mm

**Corolla colour:** pale lilac with white throat and 2 purple bee lines

**Shape of lips:** Upper lip short, lower lip 4 –lobed, lower 2 lobes enlarged

**Spacing:** 5 – 12 mm( depending on growing conditions)

**Number per whorl:** 2

**Form:** racemose

**Hairiness:**

**Calyx colour:** green underneath, purple on top

**Calyx shape:** 5 pointed lobes (3/2)

**Hairiness:** hairs present and oil glands

On maturity, the calices expand a little, opening wider from top to bottom

**Stamens:** exserted, anthers purple on top and white underneath

**Stigma:** Purple. No hairs

**Stems:** Purplish brown

**Length of flowering time:** 12 months at Finn Grove. In Warrandyte, where frosts occur in winter, the flowering season is limited to 10 months

**Other distinguishing features:** Smell is similar to *Salvia muiirii*

**Fruit:** Very few seeds set. These are currently being germinated.

**Arja Toivenan**

## **Dear Mr. McCoy,**

You don't know me, but I went to the Benalla Botanica Conference and I wanted to tell you about my experience there. I am not a garden designer, just a home gardener who loves her garden. I am trying to learn more and garden better in these difficult times. I am not going to say the "D" word because oh lord I am so tired of it.

I did learn such a lot at the Conference and the speakers were informative and often inspiring, sometimes funny. However, I wonder how many others were feeling like me? We know that our gardening practice must change, that the majority of our gardens must be tough and able to survive without copious amounts of water. The Conference speakers gave us many great ideas about how to be water wise etc but where has the joy of gardening gone? Gardening isn't just about being sensible and thrifty with the watering can. Most of us garden for the magic.

I was feeling quite flat and overwhelmed until your talk on the last day. You said "gardeners are a defiant lot"... and thank you Mr. McCoy for indeed we are! I can be sensible and plant tough, water wise plants. I have changed my gardening practice and I do like the lovely grasses, native plants, succulents and cacti that are available now. But I'll tell you a secret Mr. McCoy. They don't make my heart sing like some others. Most of my garden is able to withstand the vagaries of our climate very well but I have saved a bit of the other kind too. Oh this favourite bit is still quite tough...not quite as tough as the major plantings though. This part is where I can go on a golden morning, very early, just as the sun is coming up. This part is where I can be overwhelmed by the rampant growth, lost in the scent of a thousand flowers and delighted by the play of light amongst the leaves. This is the part that brings joy to my eye

and peace to my soul.

Why we garden is as different as we are all different. My garden won't be ever like yours but I know we garden for the same reason. We garden for those pictures in our head. What this garden will look like next week, next month, next year. The dream is why we garden.

During your talk you put up a slide of the first garden you made at Mt Macedon and you said something about probably not gardening like that anymore. Gardening is all about change isn't it? But I have to say that I still get lots of pleasure from the photographs I have of your garden then. It is still beautiful. Garden on!

**Maureen Scoble**

### **BENALLA BOTANICA 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER, 2007**

After thoroughly enjoying the inaugural Benalla Botanica I was determined to see what was in store at the 2007 event. So I booked for the full three days of the conference. The theme, 'Gardens in a Changing Climate', I felt, was an appropriate title for today's gardeners and the presenters took full advantage of what they believed to be a wide range of plants and designs which would succeed without too much use of that precious commodity, water. I was not disappointed with the weekend, and I came back to looking at my own garden thinking how I could translate what I had seen and heard into making my 'little patch of dirt (dust)' into something not only good to look at, but quite sustainable in this changing climate.

Michael McCoy once again proved to be a fantastic MC. His own passion for gardens and garden design, his down to earth attitude, and his wide knowledge of people and plants made sure that the programme ran along smoothly throughout the whole weekend. In fact I'm sure if Michael wanted a career change he would be in high demand as the perfect Master of Ceremonies.

Now for a run down on all the speakers! The key-note speaker was Dan Hinkley, a fine plantsman from the west coast of the United States of America. Dan had been well known for many years for his Heronswood Nursery where he boasted that about 3000 plants were listed in his catalogue. I was lucky enough to have the good fortune to browse through one of his catalogues some years back, and it certainly turned my legs to jelly just reading about all the desirable plants which one could not obtain here in Australia. His first address was about the creating of his new garden, Windcliff, on a south facing bluff overlooking Puget Sound, then on Sunday morning he told us about some of his plant hunting expeditions. I quote from Dan, 'I find the most inspiration and satisfaction by looking at plants in the wild – is that a natural progression for gardeners?' Dan kept the audience enthralled, not only with his various exploits whilst developing Windcliff, and tracking down desirable plants in the wild, but also with his wonderful, if not sometimes irreverent keen sense of humour. Thank goodness morning tea came before the next speaker – we all had to come back down to earth somehow.

The second speaker was Georgina Martyn of Bold Simplicity Designs, a Melbourne based company. The title of 'Designing with integrity, sustainability and soul' made me immediately interested but unfortunately for me that's where it ended. Georgina didn't sound convincing and I'm afraid her designs didn't inspire me. Maybe I was still 'on a high' after Dan Hinkley but I was glad when she completed her session.

Peter Nixon, from Paradisus, Sydney was a delightful speaker – full of humour and his mantra of 'Best fit, best fit, best fit' was full of common sense. Unfortunately his choice of plants were

best suited to his area and really didn't apply to most Victorian gardeners. Never-the-less there were valuable lessons which could be gained from his presentation – look for plants with good structure as well as aesthetic appeal and grow plants suitable to your own growing conditions.

I thought when reading about the next speaker, 'Oh no, not more environmental issues being pushed down our throats.' But I swallowed my thoughts because Aaron Wood from Firestarter Pty Ltd captured all my attention from the start. What a dedicated and delightful young man he turned out to be! He was the 2007 Prime Minister's Environmentalist of the Year Award winner and his commitment to the environment was covered on the ABC's Australian Story back in 2004. His main aim is to encourage today's young people into thinking about the health of the environment and encouraging them to do something about it now before it is too late.

The drought affected Zoe Monotti's garden near Geelong to such an extent that she had to drastically rethink her garden, Strathbrae. With the help of Michael McCoy and Cathy Newing, the garden has blossomed again, albeit quite differently from the original. With the careful selection of hardy plants Zoe's dreams of a beautiful garden have once again been realized. Hearing Zoe, Michael and Cathy bouncing ideas back and forwards showed how important it was to have garden designers who are sympathetic to the garden owner's wishes.

William Martin from 'Wigandia' Victoria really needs no introduction. His garden has featured on a number of TV programmes and his philosophy on gardening certainly extends beyond traditional gardening as we know it. His egotistical and eccentric nature can, at times, get a little wearing but his topic 'Magic, murder and the weather' certainly showed how he succeeded in producing a quite unique garden which takes you more inside the mind of the man and a reluctant admiration arises for his flaunting of the establishment and its conventional views. Once again there was much we could learn by just looking at various combinations of plants and making note of plant selections.

Michael McCoy then rounded off the sessions by stating that 'Gardens and gardening are a few of the most grounding activities available, putting us in intimate contact with our surrounds'. A view that I'm sure the majority of us would agree with.

So once again the Benalla Botanica succeeded in giving food for thought for gardeners, with its lectures, garden visits and trade displays. I'm now looking forward to Benalla Botanica number three.'

*Lesley Eaton – Swanpool, Victoria*

### SALVIAS IN SE QUEENSLAND – January 2008

The drought has broken on the Sunshine Coast and several other areas but still not enough rain is falling in the Brisbane catchment areas so relief from water restrictions is not in sight for the metropolitan area. A pipeline is being built from the Sunshine Coast water catchment area to feed the metropolitan dams but it will be sometime before completion. What a lot of different climatic zones we have in SEQ. We have had around 20 inches of rain since Christmas on the Sunshine Coast – a lot more than some regions. For us though it is enough for now! I feel bad saying that when so many are still desperate for rain!

One of our members whose garden Trudi Fry visited as our guest speaker last June, has been devastated by floods in early January. Their home was fine but the garden trashed. The structure of trees and shrubs remains intact but undergrowth ripped away never to be seen again. They are slowly cleaning up the

debris and in time our group will be helping them with stock to replant their garden. We had such a lovely day there last year in their beautiful garden. Eighteen inches of rain fell at the head of their river in a few hours and a wall of water hit their property at midnight – can you imagine how terrifying this would be!

Some salvias are looking a little sad – *S. semi atrata* and *S. mexicana* ‘Lolly’ are in a rather wet spot and look like they will not be with us for much longer. A new bed we have created in the past months in a very well drained position is to be the home of many new salvias and I am hoping by the time we open mid June with AOGS they will be well established and many will be flowering. *S. microphylla wislizenii*, *S. involucrata* ‘Timboon Red’, *S. karwinskii* ‘Verdi’, *S. gesneriiflora* ‘Red Rambler’, *S. ‘Meg’s Mystique’*, *S. gravida*, *S. ‘Desley’*, *S. curtiflora*, *S. atrocyanea* and *S. corrugata* are some of the ones that are new to me.

The Heatwave series are doing well for me – they seem to be strong good compact plants that flower profusely. Trudi was amazed at the number of seedling splendens I have – so much variety in their colours. We have recently renovated an area under a large dombeya and planted camellias and between these I have dotted splendens seedlings to give some colour when we open in June. It will be interesting to see the finished product!

Knowing when to prune to get flowering in mid winter is a bit of a stab in the dark! All the large winter flowerers I am giving a good hair cut now. With the weather the way it is – high humidity – I am cutting only half the plant down at a time and will wait for fresh shoots before taking the remainder of it as at this time of year salvias can turn up their toes if treated too harshly. The growth has been amazing and *S. ‘Phyllis Fancy’* and *S. macrophylla* have gone crazy – both such beautiful salvias but they need to be kept under control! *S. macrophylla* self sows rather profusely but very easy to pull out. *S. Costa Rican Blue* and *S. madrensis* are putting on a good show but then *Costa Rican Blue* does that all year.

The relatively new *S. oxyphora* is a stunning plant but we have noticed that it has a tendency to run and I am finding it popping up several feet away from the main plant. It is not invasive in the way that *S. guarantica* is as it is easy to pull out and pot up for someone else. The furry burgundy pink flower is wonderful! It is strange how some plants will self sow or run in one garden but not in another – several members have reported that their *S. oxyphora* has been very well behaved – others are having the same trouble as I am. Maybe it is Buderim soil!

I am traveling to SA in March/April and returning via Melbourne so I am looking forward to catching up with Pat Anderson at Warrandyte and seeing her garden. We lived in this area when we were in Melbourne and our sons went to primary school together. I hope their AOGS opening goes well in March. I plan on seeing Trudi’s garden for the first time also.

Barb Wickes  
The Perennial Poppies Group Inc  
SE Queensland

## NOBELIUS UPDATE

Well we’ve started!! A massive progressive program has begun at the display garden.

First Jillian, Lyndi, Geoff Ellis and Ray began by planting the large Salvias in one bed in late October, then Jillian and Lyndi went up to plant the opposite bed with large pink Salvias in early November. We made one huge mistake, we didn’t realize what a horrible day it was to be – ( it started with mist all around but when it cleared, the day was to be hot!, humid and horrible) Nobelius has it’s

own microclimate of humidity and heat. We had forgotten this small fact and were planting in the afternoon sun!! We finally finished after a huge effort.

All the previous plantings were looking good when the next planting day was scheduled in late November. This was the beginning of the planting of the small Salvias at the front of the beds and graduating up towards the middle. These are all contrasting to one another in flower colour/ growth habit / leaf colour/shape.

Again this was a massive planting exercise with the help of Bevan and Pat and Jillian who did the hard slog this time - me -I ran around placing the plants, working out where to put them. Some we didn't have so an odd assortment of sticks were used for their allocated places. This time we started on the hot side in the morning ( again nice and cool ) and finished on the cooler side in the afternoon, but again it was hot work and looked magnificent when finished. I have been up there since with plants to fill in some of those bare places, ( eliminating some of those funny sticks)

The donation of plants has been magnificent, from various people, including Meg, Trudi, Jillian, Margaret & Neil Kier, Karen M., myself and Pat, they and others have given so generously for the display garden.

The new year will begin with more planting of smaller Salvias, but in the lower beds. If anyone would like to donate any surplus plants for this, please ring me on Ph 98034534.

I would like to take the time to thank everyone involved in this project, their efforts have been greatly appreciated.

I will ring around again in Feb. Mar. for the next planting session.- Even if you can't physically plant, you may be able to organize the tea / coffee / Water!! and moral support.

Thankyou everyone

Lyndi Garnett

## THE ROSE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL SHOW

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> DECEMBER 2007

The Salvia Study Group was asked to have a stand at the Rose Society's Annual Show due to a last minute cancellation of another group. We were pleased to accept.

On the first day there was an air of excitement around the show as overseas judges and many well known personalities from the gardening fraternity came to judge the many beautiful roses. The displays were exquisite. Our stand was always surrounded by rose enthusiasts who were genuinely interested in the salvias asking lots of questions about the various plants. One question that was asked often was about a salvia called 'Blue Hills'. The head gardener from the Flemington Racecourse had been on radio prior to the Melbourne Cup Carnival talking about the roses at Flemington. He said that he planted, between the roses, the salvia 'Blue Hills' We didn't have a Blue Hills salvia for sale and didn't even know what it was thinking it was probably a commercial name when Jillian Barkell came up with the answer: *Salvia x superba* 'Blau Hugel'..

Although we didn't have those for sale either we sold other salvias that would grow between the roses and look equally as attractive. The weekend was very successful and I have lovely visions of salvias growing comfortably and enhancing different varieties of rose bushes.

Irene Robinson

## **KEEPING IN TOUCH**

### **Notes from Pakenham Garden Club.**

How great it was to again have the Salvia Study Group at our Annual Garden Expo. Your group certainly is a major drawcard and this year (2008) you feature prominently on our advertising flyer.

Those of our members who have been converted to Salvias are amazed at how well they are doing in these present dry conditions.

In my garden, some only planted since our expo, when I brought home the leftovers for Lyndi Garnett to collect from my house, have grown beyond all expectations. I had to make a new garden bed to accommodate them.

Our club is looking forward to visiting Trudi's garden on March 4<sup>th</sup>, more plants available to us!

Trudi's talks at our club have inspired many to try these wonderful plants.

Happy new year (and gardening!)

Meryl Waterhouse

Co-ordinator

Pakenham Garden Club

email [kw@trafractor.com.au](mailto:kw@trafractor.com.au)

### **FROM GRAHAM ELLIS**

In December I was looking around Mark Dymiotis' Salvia Garden to see what needed attention. As I approached the *Salvia purpurea* plant growing at about 1.2m I suddenly had a very strange thought. (Salvia plants have opposite leaves so at each node there are two leaves. At home on our *Salvia gesneriiflora* 'Tequila' occasionally we had three leaves arise from each node. This means that the stem has changed from being square to having six sides.) I suddenly thought "three leaves" and thought of our plant at home. Well I was not that surprised to find that the closest stem had this triplet formation: not noted previously on this plant. The really amazing thing was that my brain had interpreted an image and came up with the triplet idea before I saw the triplet in front of me.

Now why does a Salvia do this? If a plant can put three leaves where two would normally go then probably it can photosynthesise better. This suggests that Mark's plants are growing really well with no shortage of light, water or minerals. Certainly the plants are now growing well and moving towards abundant flowering for the Open Weekend in February.

### **FROM TRUDI FRY**

I gathered some excellent *Salvia lavanduloides* cuttings about 20 metres from the poly house and by the time I had trimmed them ready for planting they were limp and so was I, just too hot to do anything, so I took them with me up to the house and put them in the fridge standing in a glass of cold water. (The cuttings, not me.) Next day they looked terrific and after planting in potting mix continue to look good. Yesterday I did the same thing with *S. fulgens* and it seems to have worked again. Cuttings are taking and doing well in spite of the heat.

**WHEN YOU RENEW YOUR SUBS.PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY; ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, MOBILE NUMBER, EMAIL ADDRESS AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS WHEN APPLICABLE. LYNDI GARNETT**

### **Salvia fanatics Christmas luncheon, 2007**

The Salvia fanatics Christmas luncheon has become a regular event in our calendar – it is one of those occasions that takes priority over other engagements. For the salvia fanatics, it is of course one of those occasions when they can fanaticise and gossip about their latest observations and news. For partners of salvia fanatics – well, the Christmas gathering never disappoints in providing good entertainment watching the salvia fanatics. And every body always enjoys the camaraderie and the food.

The Christmas 2007 event did not disappoint. It was held at Trudi's garden in the Dandenong's at Selby on a beautiful day. With help from Jillian, Trudi had done wonders to have her garden, grounds and home in top order. We parked our cars on a spacious lawn surrounded by massive spikes of Salvia "Costa Rican Blue". We worked our way to the back veranda via pathways edged by great tors of granite, the local stone, interspersed with an assembly of bricks and ceramic creations of all sorts of forms and shapes – some brilliantly coloured and others less so. It took several trips to convey chairs, food, victuals and of course tray loads of coveted and unusual salvias to the back veranda. There then followed the usual swift swaps and deals of salvias and most of the salvia fanatics whisked their new acquisitions out to their securely locked cars. It was pleasing to note, however, that one salvia fanatic thought that this sort of response was unnecessary and chose instead to put her precious plants to one side expecting them to be there later when she went home. Well, it is nice to think that their disappearance was an honest mistake.

Lunch soon got under way and it didn't take long for clusters of people to form. The conversations coming from some of these was highly animated and quite unintelligible presumably because the participants were committed salvia fanatics talking about salvias. There were other groups who began by talking about a variety of topics but the participants soon developed a glazed look and became surrounded by empty wine bottles rather as parrots become surrounded by seed husks if let loose on a bowl of sunflower seeds. Regardless of which cluster people belonged to, everyone made a rush when the berry fruits, ice creams and other sweets came out. People filled their bowls with everything imaginable, drowned the contents with cream and then resumed their various discussions about putting the world, and in some cases, salvias, to right.

For the guests, it was a memorable day out. Our only disappointment was that Trudi, our hostess, exacerbated her bad back preparing her home and garden for our enjoyment. We think the only thing that kept her going as she quietly and bravely nursed her back and joints was the pick-me up she obtained from the fragrance of the salvias that pervaded the house and garden. Trudi, we are sorry about the pain and misery you experienced but we hope you received some small reward in seeing the obvious pleasure experienced by your guests on the day.

Thanks Trudi and those who assisted her (Jillian in particular) for a great day out.

**John Anderson**

### **The salvia fanatic and the serpent**

Early every morning my partner, Pat, inspects her salvias while munching from a bowl of muesli topped with preserved fruit and fresh yoghurt. The daily inspection is used to determine the day's priorities. On dry days the first task usually involves recording on a spread sheet the condition of each individual salvia in the garden. However, on mornings after rain or heavy dew, Pat knows that the gastropods will be out

in full force attacking her salvias and so on these occasions priority is given to taking affirmative action against the enemy. Pat's weapon for controlling gastropods is a large yoghurt pot of water containing a good lashing of liquid detergent. Soft-bodied animals with a wet skin such as slugs and snails are especially sensitive to surface active agents with the result that when enemy troops are placed in the container they are very rapidly subdued.

Last year, about the time of the autumn equinox, we had many beautifully warm sunny days followed by chilly nights. Once during this period Pat inspected the garden on a very snappy morning after a heavy dew. She knew that the enemy would be out and so she went off in search of gastropods, taking particular care to lift the foliage of those plants that she knew to be their favourite hiding places. She checked the "New World" and "Latium" plots and soon had a good haul of slugs and snails in her container. Although the plants in the "Gondwana" plot are not known to be especially attractive targets to gastropods she nonetheless thought she would check underneath the canopy of the "grass" tussock *Splottium unknownum* (more correctly it is a sedge tussock belonging to the genus *Carex*) where she has seen battalions of gastropods take refuge from time to time. But instead of revealing a mass of gastropods she found instead a very compactly coiled-up serpent which in this form appeared quite small. Fortunately it was quite inactive on account of the very low morning temperature and this probably explained why it was so tightly coiled up. Although the serpent was just a few centimetres from her bare hands Pat decided it was not necessary, nor for that matter, wise, to place the tidily packaged creature in her container of detergent.

Pat came down to the house and casually explained that she had found a serpent coiled up under a tussock in the "Gondwana" plot and that she thought she would leave it undisturbed as it was "only a little one and not doing any harm". We discussed the situation and noted that the serpent would be very active in an hour or so when the temperature increased dramatically. We also noted that it had taken up residence in a high use area where Pat constantly tends her plants with un-gloved hands with her face close to the ground. Much as we dislike taking action against serpents we agreed that it would be wise to be proactive in this instance as the serpent could prove to be a weapon of mass destruction. Indeed we had already noticed that the croaking of frogs in the pond on the other side of the path opposite the tussock had ceased a few days previously and that there was the danger that a higher organism might be the next to stop croaking. (Hence the derivation of the verb 'to croak', meaning 'to expire').

Pat lifted the foliage of the tussock with a stick and there it was, exactly as she had described. I brought down a long-handled implement very firmly as the ground beneath the serpent was spongy due to a covering of pea straw as well as decaying leaves from the tussock. But, despite the serpent's obvious torpor, the spongy nature of the straw allowed it to gradually wriggle out from under the implement towards the protection of the thick vegetation on the far side of the tussock. We made frantic moves to prevent the getaway and several times when we thought we had it secured so that we could extract it, it would again start to wriggle out until eventually just a few centimetres of tail were still visible. At this stage Pat decided that, as it was still pinned down, and since "we must have given it a bit of a headache", she would pull it out. So she grabbed the serpent's tail and pulled like hell. It was meant to be "only a little one" but, as Pat pulled, out came 50 centimetres, then 60, 70, 80 centimetres. After she had extracted a metre the head had still not appeared and Pat thought it would be sensible to let go at this stage. With deft movements of our implements we were able to flick the serpent onto the firm gravel path where it was easy to take decisive action. There it was, a neatly banded 115 centimetre specimen of *Notechis scutatus*, the common tiger snake which seemed so small when it was compactly coiled up. I did wonder whether Pat had stretched it when she pulled it out but since snakes are vertebrates with a skeleton I soon discounted this idea.

The serpent was duly laid to rest on the compost heap. There, given due processing consistent with the concept of sustainable production, we confidently expect to recycle the serpent, perhaps in the form of one of those pungent fragrances so typical of the genus *Salvia*.

**John Anderson**

I have had close encounters with 2 snakes so far this summer: the first was actually aggressive - a copperhead. Yesterday it was an obliging tiger snake that just retreated back into the rock wall - can't say I blame it. They know they are a protected animal. Pat Anderson

### GREGGII CRIMSON AND BLACK

My baby, a chance seedling in my garden, grown on for 2 years, tested for hardiness and generosity of flowering through some horrible conditions, admired and loved and then propagated and sold by The Victorian Salvia Study Group for about another 3 years is being produced by a commercial nursery. How do I feel? Flattered I suppose. We always knew it was good. Wish they had asked me. But as a Salvia Study Group and a 'not for profit group' we sell plants to further our work. I now have another chance seedling which I believe is just as good. Tough and beautiful and white, I have named her *microphylla* 'Snow White'. Research may find that she is a *greggii* or a *microphylla* cross. But anyway as a glowing big white flower with strong green leaves and, what my Dad would say about a good cow "a good doer", I am pleased to have another treasure.

Trudi Fry

### SALVIA SUMMIT 2008 -CABRILLO COLLEGE

A unique plant conference on salvias is taking place on 1<sup>st</sup>&2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008 at Cabrillo College in Aptos California in the horticultural department overlooking Monterey Bay featuring a large collection of salvias with emphasis on geographic origin and habitat. The contact person is Jessie Schilling email [grew@pachell.net](mailto:grew@pachell.net) Please include Salvia Summit in your email heading

### NOTES ON *Salvia miltiorrhiza*

**Common names: Dan Chen, Chinese Red Sage.**

A lovely salvia sage from China, low growing and prefers a semi-shaded position, or a position, facing south-east, with morning sun. Those who have grown this salvia and enjoyed its dainty blooms, may have observed that there are two forms. One with lavender flowers and lighter green foliage and the other with purple flowers and a darker green foliage. Both grow to about the same height and width, around 30cm x 30-40cm.

Sometimes, with plants that are similar, the leaves might be the only distinguishing feature if the plant is not in flower, but a few pointers can be seen on closer observation with *salvia miltiorrhiza*. Leaves are variable in both forms and range from compound, tri-foliolate, oddly pinnate and sometimes a simple blade. ( See diagrams).

Leaves of the lavender form are a lighter green, tri-foliolate with the apex usually rounded and the veins not so prominent. The blade surface can vary between elliptic-ovate to broadly lanceolate and in many cases the apices can be obtuse but usually they are acuminate (come to a point). Sometimes, due to stress, there is a slight reddish tinge along the margin. The leaves of the purple flowering form, (which shall be stated here as the darker form) are also tri-foliolate and oddly-pinnate and the leaflets broadly-lanceolate to elliptic shaped, with the apices mostly acuminate and the veins more pronounced. Margins are noticeably crenate on both forms.

The flowers are just lovely on both forms but the lavender flowers have the appearance of a frilly lower lip and the darker form has a slightly divided lower lip with a few nicks across the bottom. Calyces vary between the two, naturally the lavender form has a lighter green

calyx than the purple form which has a purple tinge on the topside of the calyx. This could vary if the plant was growing in more shade.

Since this salvia species comes from China and grows naturally at higher altitudes (to 1300m) by streams, hillsides and forest clearings, it only stands to reason that we should replicate a suitable climate to suit its needs. I have found that whilst plants come from cooler climates, with ample sunlight, finding a cooler position in the garden, preferably with morning sun, facing south-east or in filtered light does help. Mulch well to keep the roots cool. Flowering can start in early spring and go through to summer. Taking off the spent flowers early will encourage a second flush of flowers.

Meg Bentley

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