

# SalviaNews

January/February 2002

**THE HERB SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.**

**The Victorian Salvia Study Group**

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It is so exciting to be in 2002 with the Salvia Expo just a few weeks away. Last year was a great year for the Salvia Study Group with much progress made and this newsletter is now getting feedback from interstate as well as N.Z. I hope all your salvias are thriving and that you are too.

Some of us have had a bad start to the year healthwise, but with skilful professional care and anti-biotics are becoming well again rapidly. Donna, who decided to use the mower to do a little self-pruning on her big toe is ever so much wiser now. We are full of enthusiasm for Salvia Expo and the Salvias are eager to show off.

Salvia Expo is the first chance for you to see a very wide range of the Salvias available in Australia in the one place. As Sue explains in her article, nurseries only sell a limited range of bulk propagated plants and they are often not named correctly. It is essential to give plants their right botanical name and details of place of origin are helpful for successful gardening and also to make our collecting more meaningful. You will have an opportunity to meet gardeners who use salvias for year round colour in the garden as well as to enjoy talks by experts and have salvias identified.

We are very enthusiastic about our **Salvia Expo** happening on March 17! There will be so much to see, learn and do (and for sale), an event that must not be missed.

There will be some *rare and unusual* salvias on show and for sale - even for collectors, there is bound to be one or two you haven't got in your garden or heard about.

Informative talks and demonstrations will continue throughout the day - something for everyone. Expertise on hand to identify that salvia you have had in your garden forever or answer any of your questions.

Ferry Creek garden tours and refreshments are offered. Salvias will be raffled during the day.

Refer to the attached flyer for more details.

## Flight Time Salvia

I am on a plane. Two hours to Brisbane. Ansett says how pleased they are that we are supporting them but no longer do catering. Plastic cups of water are however, dispensed regularly. It is comfortable but crowded, so to occupy myself, decide to think about which salvia I would choose if I could have only one. Too easy. It has to be *Salvia fruticosa*. The best cooking sage, the best tea sage, medicinal, and has sentimental connections to a wonderful trip to Knossos in Crete. It is tough and tolerates benign neglect in my garden. It would like more water than I can give it but self prunes when it feels the need. The rather too good drainage of my soil is something it loves. All salvias like good drainage but some more than others. It grows into a woody bush with grey-green leaves and has masses of pale lilac flowers in spring. Bees and birds love it.

Not even halfway, probably still in Victoria. I'll give myself another salvia. This is **my** 'in flight entertainment' so there! *Salvia chiapensis* is a tough, tolerant beauty, flowering through weeds and beating them at their own game all year round. The patch below the studio has no idea what a hose is and I have been promising to weed it for the last five years but other jobs come first. This is the sort of thing one can say is an experimental plot-chiapensis versus weeds. The mode of growth is spready and there are a few suckers now. The leaves are good and the flowers are profuse and cyclamen. A good container plant with a graceful stylish look.

But I love blue best of all. Which one? *Salvia* Costa Rican Blue is gorgeous with those black buds hanging like grapes until the long inflorescence straightens up and the indigo flowers come out. Then there is *Salvia patens*, the very essence of blue in a good year. *Salvia rubiginosa* is new (from Sue Templeton) but has won my heart in its first flowering in my garden; blue flowers, dark bracts, a stunning combination. *Salvia sagittata* could be my next love but it hasn't flowered for me yet. Then there is *Salvia corrugata* a blue to dream about. After a long panic stricken drought during which I had been cutting back dying plants and giving the most precious a meagre amount of water, two *S. corrugata* were in bud and very stressed. Both got chopped back even though we hadn't seen it flower yet. One died. In fact I thought both had, until my birthday in June and there through the shambles of dry sticks was a heavenly blue bunch of flowers. It was raining too. A terrific birthday present. The leaves are a good green and corrugated, naturally. Mode of growth? It depends on whom you ask. Cuttings strike easily so I have tall ones, straggly ones looped through other plants and some very satisfactory ones in containers. These have great structure and flower well. Flowering seems to happen randomly through the year and there is usually one in flower. Two seedlings are growing well and soon to flower. Yes, I love all the blues but everyone needs some purple in their life.

*Salvia* Purple Majesty and *Salvia* Black Knight surrounded by *Salvia verticillata* makes a great purple patch. One needs a purple patch. But the list is growing and I did begin by saying one salvia. One useful and beautiful and one just beautiful must be the limit for this flight.

So, *Salvia semi-atrata* springs to mind. Corolla purple/blue, calyx almost cyclamen, leaves strong green with a pebbly texture, attitude to life in extremes very determined on survival. Flowers almost all year. Not easy for me to propagate, just one success so far but the plan is for a massed psychedelic *S. semi-atrata* bed and at least six in containers. Right now it seems to me to have everything a salviaholic needs and we are fastening seat belts for landing.

*Trudi Fry*

Sage is singularly good for the head and brain, it quickeneth the senses and memory, strengtheneth the sinews, restoreth health to those that have the palsy and taketh away shakey trembling of the members.

- John Gerard, *The Herball*, 1597

Thanks to Helen Fallshaw for the above.

### **From Our Foreign Correspondent**

Just back from a month overseas visiting the UK, Greece and Turkey, Lyndi is now getting on with the job of cleaning up a garden neglected during this time abroad and working hard towards the Salvia Expo. *Salvia leucantha*, *S. munzii*, *S. africana caerulea*, *S. apiana* and *S. apiana*/var. *apiana* were seen by Lyndi at the Eden Project in Cornwall in England. We look forward to more details in the next issue.

*Lyndi Garnett*

### **Pleasant Salvia Surprises or 'Thank God for the Salvias'**

Over the relatively short time I have been growing salvias, I've lost my share, but I've also had some unexpected surprises. Generally I've found that salvias are extremely resilient, too dry, neglect, crowding, even digging out. I have two greyhounds, and one loves 'helping'.

Over the past six months I've been fairly incapacitated. I am, as Trudi said at the Christmas party, 'the lady with The Leg', that is the broken leg/hip. So my salvias have had to take second place. When I managed to go back into my garden just before Christmas, I found that *Salvia cinnabarina* had almost taken over one bed – although it hasn't flowered yet. When I pulled at various runners (some rooted), and tried to clear some ground, I found to my delight that *Salvia africana caerulea* was growing happily away underneath the jungle. A bit surprising, as not only did I think I'd lost it, but I distinctly remember planting it on the other side of the pathway!

Then there is a little apricot flowered gem, bought I can't remember where, that seems to turn up all over the garden, in the driest possible corners. This Meg identified at Christmas as *Stachys coccinea*. This not being an easy identification, because having said I have plants all over, the day of the party, they all suddenly vanished, and the small leaf and flower I managed to find, withered very badly enroute to Nobelius.

After *Salvia leucantha* and *S. uliginosa*, one of the first salvias that came into my garden, was a plant my Mother won at a garden show. We were told it was 'special'. Well, it grew and grew, and eventually flowered a brilliant pink, but the rosemary and the roses grew more strongly and drank more water, so my poor *Salvia dorisiana* spent most of last summer wilting. Nevertheless, I think the plant had a mind of its own, because in autumn, I saw familiar leaves coming up, many metres away from the old plant. This new plant grew and grew, and when it flowered, proved to be a very healthy plant of *S. dorisiana*. Last week I cut back the old original, which I think might just shoot again, given enough water. I find that *S. dorisiana* is very good in a vase, it holds its flowers for at least a couple of weeks, unlike *Salvia involucrata*, which seems to drop them immediately it's gathered.

My other big surprise was *Salvia buchananii*, of which I have many labels, but no sign of a plant. For a long time I was confused between *Salvia chiapensis* and *S. buchananii*, which to real salvia growers is probably a pretty stupid thing. However, at this stage, I can't actually

remember having what I now know as *S. buchananii* in flower, and I suspect that some plants of *S. chiapensis* I have bought, were mislabelled. So, I put *S. buchananii* on my list to buy. You can imagine my surprise when I was watering a few days ago, to see what is Definitely a *S. buchananii*. It is growing at the bottom of a bank, on the top of which is a healthy plant of *S. chiapensis*, but where I can't remember ever planting a salvia of any type! I doubt a bird dropped it, and I shall never know how it got there – it is however lovely, although still very small. It will be one to nurture if summer ever comes.

My last little find was *Salvia coccinea* Alba. Whereas I have *S. coccinea* Scarlet Lady come up all over the place, including one which tangles itself quite happily around a fuchsia, and although I have bought endless Albas, I have never managed to keep one going. I did have a bicolour that appeared from nowhere and lived for many months, right outside the back door, despite being trodden on and knocked on an almost daily basis. In fact it only disappeared when we had some concreting done last winter. A little plant actually appeared on the far side of the concrete in spring, but that too has died down – for the time being? But Alba, not only couldn't I keep mine going, I couldn't seem to buy another. Then, last Sunday at the Berwick market, there was a row of *S. coccinea* Alba – all with labels Coccinea Bicolour. I brought one home and planted it, and afterwards thought I should have had a spare, but of course this week there were only red on sale.

*Winsome Thom*

### **Salvia Maintenance**

A brief introduction for gardeners wanting to know more about maintaining salvias in their garden. To do this effectively one needs to know a little about particular species, its habit, growing requirements, flowering periods and pruning.

Rule of thumb; note if the leaves are grey and rough textured or hairy, this can indicate that on the whole, these plants need the sun and warmth and usually means that they are from a fairly dry region.

On the other hand, if the leaves are lush green, rather than thin in texture, smooth or slightly hairy, this can indicate that they hail from the humid regions of Central or South America. Most of these have a preference for morning sun rather than the hot afternoon sun or to be grown in a partly shaded position, especially in our climate. Extra sun is not a great problem if they have a cool root system which is one of their main requirements. This can be achieved by either close planting of shrubs, placement of rocks and heaps of mulch.

Soil types are not really a problem as most salvias will grow in any garden loam, whether it be clay, sandy, volcanic or stony etc just as long as it has good drainage and the plants will not suffer with wet feet. The exception of course is *Salvia uliginosa*, the Bog Sage, which will spread to its hearts content when planted anywhere near moisture, although it will also grow in a drier position which slows down or halts the rampant root system.

Poor soils including sandy loams can be built up with compost and manures to give them a bit of substance and mulching should be a necessity to help minimise the need for watering. If the soil is an average garden loam you can choose to dig whether to dig in the compost and manures or to place it around the top, serving as a mulch after planting.

Water, as we all know, is a precious commodity in Australia, therefore, choice of plants using a minimum of water is the way to go, if they are quite hardy and look good into the bargain then that is an added bonus and there are many Salvias to choose from. Most salvias need a good watering when planting out into the garden, and then follow up with perhaps a water every week or two for the first season, much depends on the weather and also on the type of salvia. Salvias from South Africa would rather have a drier climate and will take the heat,

therefore, watering is not a primary concern once they have settled in. This applies to Californian and some North American species too.

Feeding salvias can be done with slow release granules, which give most plants all they need or use blood and bone or any old manure if you prefer. Water it into the soil well and follow up with occasional feeds of liquid fertiliser during the growing season.

*Meg Bentley*

### **Salvia Hunting**

There are not many plant hunters or plantsmen and women in the whole world. The really rare plants don't come through major nurseries. They arrive through passionate plant people who go to great lengths to obtain them. Usually plantsmen and women are members of the North American Rock Garden Society and the Alpine Garden Society where the creme de la creme of new plants first appear. There is also the Scottish Rock Garden Society and the Hardy Plants Society who are major contributors to plant introductions. The real plant collectors advertise a proposed expedition to the Himalayas or China or wherever and people contribute in advance which entitles them a share of seed collected. (Panayoti Kelaidis arrived in Afghanistan to collect seed last September!!!!!!) Often they go through difficult circumstances in travelling and accommodation on their expedition. After going to so much trouble to obtain and rear seed the plants end up like your children that you know so well and have a big interest in how they are doing.

Because of all my visiting I manage to get seed that is frequently not obtainable for love or money or I write copious begging letters trying to track down salvia species I have heard of, I get seed through seed exchanges, I buy seed from overseas suppliers. In Australia I visit nurserymen who import plants and exchange new releases with them. This is a reciprocal arrangement. I don't go round just taking or asking for lots of information without having helpful information, plant identification or plants in return. In July 2000 I went to the US and was given a lot of different seed collected straight off the plants which obviously were not still in flower. One of these was *Salvia rubiginosa*. I keep thinking there can't be more brilliant salvias, and I didn't think I would fall in love with this salvia as much as I have. So I sold a few plants before I had even seen it flower, although by then I had a photograph.

Some of my clients buy plants from me and share them straightaway with propagators. Therefore within a few months they are being sold commercially by other people than myself. This has happened with *S. rubiginosa*. I feel I have only just got the plant and someone else is already offering it. When I propagate or handle the beautifully fragrant *Salvia melissodora* I think of how clever and kind Kathe was to find the seed on this plant when other people couldn't find it and send it to me. Other propagators probably only think of the money they will get from selling it. If the plant is reasonably easy to propagate it quickly goes from there to nurseries and on to the general public.

I try to give a service to gardeners by having all possible salvia species available, all the time, for purchase whenever they get the urge to try them. Most nurseries just pick the eyes out of the best and multiply them up by the thousands, most recently with 'Waverly'. It is far more difficult to stock lots of different plants than it is to mass produce a few hundred of the same one. I now have imported a different form of 'Waverly'; 'Phyllis' Fancy' a bluer flower. When I release it no doubt it will get confused with the original.

On some salvias I have given up fighting the mistakes in naming such as *Salvia gesneriiflora*. I originally got this seed from *Salvia gesneraeflora* 'Mole Poblano' which was a selection of 'Tequila'. I spelt it the way I have because that's how it was in the RHS's 4 volume Dictionary of Gardening which James Compton edited). Seed grown plants should not carry the variety name unless it can be positively identified to be exactly the same - chromosomes matched among other things. Unfortunately it was a long time ago when I was younger and ignorant and I distributed seedlings which were a mixed bag from that batch.

Some had the green calyx, some had black. For a while it was thought (by other people) that the green calyx plant was *Salvia fulgens*. After 1997 when Betsy Clebsch's book came out somebody looked at the picture and said it looks like 'Tequila' so they put that name on it. The same thing has happened with *Salvia mexicana* 'Limelight'. I brought that seed to Australia before the name 'Limelight' was invented and again because it was seed grown it should not carry 'Limelight' as a name. I have given up caring about these two mistakes because they are widespread. However I would like to stop *Salvia involucrata* 'Mulberry Jam' before it is widespread but I don't think there is much of a chance. I have an imported 'Mulberry Jam' and it is not exactly the same as one which has been around in Australia a long time which I identify as 'Joan' but I presume someone has stuck 'Mulberry Jam' on it after looking at the picture in Betsy Clebsch's book. The incorrect 'Mulberry Jam' is not widespread as yet but if I release the imported one it will get mixed up and people who want to know which is correct will have difficulty.

I wanted to offer a sensational white with red edge *greggii* at our first salvia expo but the importer doesn't want propagators getting their hands on it so I refused the offer of even owning the plant at all for the time being. He would have grown some plants for me but I want his goodwill to import more plants for me. Unfortunately it is not worth taking out plant variety rights and once you release a plant everyone gets on the bandwagon. So I have to evaluate, should I release new plants or should I keep them to myself a lot longer?

There are some exciting salvias new to Australia but can I get a reasonably economic return for them before everyone else is flooding the market? I want sales to finance more trips. Should I price the salvias according to the difficulty in producing them? I am thinking of offering *Salvia penstemonoides* at \$10 a plant at the Expo, that is, if I have enough to offer at all. I have spent so much time and had so much difficulty obtaining that plant.

I expect to have enough of *Salvia* 'Anthony Parker' to release. This looks an absolutely smashing plant with indigo flowers and greyish foliage, but if I only have 20 or so, is it worth releasing it for the propagator's benefit so next season it will be everywhere? I will also have *Salvia guarantica* 'Omaha Gold' which has a wide gold margin to the leaf. *Salvia* 'Chiquita Blue' is a metre plus shrub with mauve flowers which I will release. *Salvia tubifera* is a 2m cerise, winter flowerer which will be a new release. *Salvia cinnabarina* is an amazing horizontal spreader with red flowers. *Salvia rubiginosa* is a winter flower with purple calyx and blue flowers. *Salvia* 'Red Dragon' imported from NZ is a 2m shrubby summer flowerer similar to *Salvia fulgens*. I should have some plants available of both of these, plus *Salvia involucrata* 'Pink Icicles' and one or two *Salvia involucrata* 'Hadspen'. I should have a good stock of *Salvia sagittatus* 'Mosquito' a beautiful royal blue, a reasonable amount of *Salvia rubescens* 'Venezuelan Beauty' which is a bit like a mini *Salvia gesneriiflora* with grey foliage and lots of other lovely plants.

*Sue Templeton*

### **Top of the Pots - Salvias for Containers and Small Gardens**

First of all, as I wrote last issue make sure your pot contains a good quick draining potting mix. Water as needed and fertilise occasionally. I am a fan of Daffy of TOTTERING-BY-GENTLY (by Annie Tempest). Daffy's instruction to her newly planted pots at the stately home is "if you want anything just wilt! And they will, and you will watch and water.

*Salvia officinalis* is a necessity outside the kitchen door. Use *Salvia officinalis purpurescens* for lovely purple leaves-some feel it is the best culinary sage. *Salvia officinalis icterina* has pretty gold variegated leaves and is also a culinary sage. These three will also flower and if you don't use enough leaves for tea or cooking like nipping back from time to time.

*Salvia semi-atrata* is a delightful thing. Dark velvet green leaves and purple/blue flowers with a magenta calyx. I describe this one differently every time I see it. *Salvia discolor* has willowy stems, silver leaves and flowers that droop from silver bracts like black tears, some say dark purple or navy blue, but the impression this Peruvian gives is unforgettable. *Salvia chiapensis* has shiny foliage, and cyclamen flowers all year round. A real survivor. In fact mine has never deigned to wilt demanding water. Probably has more character than that!

*Salvia scutellaroides* pours over the side of the pot with masses of pure blue flowers. Likes water and looks good planted with other plants to romp with. *Salvia leucantha* does well in a pot. However, I like my salvias to flower non-stop. *S. leucantha* takes a break from time to time, needs a good cut back then off it goes again and looks terrific.

More next time.

*Trudi Fry*

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For those who have not yet filled in their diary for this first half of the year.....

**2002 Calendar**

Sunday February 17	Hampton Workshop 21 Barnett Street, Hampton	11 am – 2pm
Sunday March 17	<b>SALVIA EXPO</b> Ferny Creek Hort Society Hilton Rd, Ferny Creek	9am – 5pm
Sunday April 21	Jillian Barkell's Garden 6 Halcyon Rd, The Patch	11 am – 2pm
Sunday May 19	Nobelius Workshop off Creighton Rd, Emerald	11 am onwards
Sunday June 16	Elly Roos' Garden 59 Ferguson Street, Upwey	11 am – 2pm

BYO Lunch to share is the general routine. At workshops it is recommended to bring your gloves and tools. Contact Donna Grundy on 59 688 567 or 0412 766 763 for enquiries.

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**Editor's Note:**

**If you are a recent subscriber to the SalNews, you may want back copies. Just drop a line to the address at the top of the newsletter and we will forward these on to you. You will need to let us know when you received your first SalNews so we will know which copies to send you.**

**Salvias Flowering in Member's Gardens Now January 2002**

agnes	glutinosa	nemorosa/sylvestris Snow Hills
africana caerulea	greggii Alba	nemorosa Ost Friesland
austriaca	greggii Bi-color	nemorosa Lubecca
africana lutea Namibia	greggii Coral	nilotica
africana-lutea	greggii Fulhams Red	nubicola
arizonica	greggii Lara	officinalis
algeriensis	greggii x micro	patens
Barreleirii spell	greggii Pumpkin	pratensis
blancoana	greggii Raspberry Royal	purpurea !!
Black Knight	greggii Sierra Pink	pulchella
blepharophylla	guaranitica	Purple Majesty
Blue Ribbons	guaranitica Argentine Skies	Red Dragon
buchananii	karvinskii dark calyx	roemeriana
cacaliaefolia	karvinskii green calyx	rubinigosa
chamaedryoides	karvinskii x involucrata	rubescens
chiapensis	leucophylla	rugosa
chiapas species	longispicata	runcinata
coahuilensis	Marine Blue	sagittata(lucky Bill)
coccinea	mellifera	scabra
coccinea Alba	mellisadora	sclarea
coccinea bi-color	mexicana major	sclarea Turkestanica
coccinea Coral Nymph	mexicana minor	scutellarioides
coccinea pale	mexicana white	semi-atrata
coccinea red	mexicana Limelight	sinoloensis
corrugata	mexicana Lolly	spathacea
Costa Rican Blue	microphylla Baby sage	splendens varieties
discolor	microphylla Huntingdon	splendens Van Houttii
disermis	microphylla Cyclaman	stenophylla
disjuncta	microphylla Bi-color	verticillata
eigii	Microphylla Musk	transcaucasica
fallax	microphylla Neurepia	transylvanica
farinacea	microphylla Iced Lemon	urica
forskaohlei	microphylla Sierra Pink	verticillata Purple Rain
fruticosa	microphylla Sensation	villosa
fruticosa Greek Skies	microphylla wislizenii	virgata
fulgens !!!	miniata	viscosa
gesneraeflora	muellerir	Waverly
gesneraeflora var. Tequila	muirii	
glechomifolia	nemorosa/sylvestris Blue Hills	

Don't forget our Salvia Expo – Sunday 17 March, 2002!  
See you there!

