

Salvia News

NUMBER 55



Official Newsletter of the
Victorian Salvia Study Group

Autumn 2014

THE VICTORIAN SALVIA STUDY GROUP

A BRANCH OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

THE AIMS OF THE SALVIA STUDY GROUP ARE:

1. To grow and collect salvias to study their growth habits.
2. To identify and name plants correctly.
3. To propagate new and existing Salvias

The group is a not for profit organization. Any monies received are used to run the Group's activities and for the planting and maintenance of our GPCAA registered garden collection.

LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR WEBSITE; www.salvias.org.au

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SALVIA NEWS

VICTORIAN SALVIA STUDY GROUP

Happy New Year! Hope your new year has been all you were hoping for. Already another season and the latest edition of Salvia News is here. As always, thank you most sincerely to all our contributors. Hope you enjoy this season's read. Let us know what you think. Tell us about your garden, your successes and or problems with your Salvias. We look forward to hearing from you.

We enjoyed a lovely day at the home of Patrick and Eileen Hogan just prior to Christmas page 14. It's always great to meet our subscribers of Salvia News. At the Christmas Luncheon Annette Bax from Townsville who was the writer of the article in Letters of the last edition of Salvia News, was warmly welcomed. Read about her trip down south page 10/11.

Have you got potted Salvias and struggling to keep them healthy during the summer months? Pat Anderson may have some solutions for you on page 5. Notes from Gruyere on page 9 and please note a visit to Meg's garden at Gruyere in March page 4. Meg Bentley has released her Salvia Cards illustrating five different salvias, just beautiful, a must have for all salvia growers page 13. There is much variety in this edition of Salvia News and hopefully something of interest for all. We have endured excessive temperatures this summer and many areas have been very dry. There have been extensive bushfires throughout the country. Our thoughts have been with you.

How did your Salvias survive the summer? Have you a hint to share as to how you manage your garden through the summer months. I use 1.5 litre soft drink bottles, cut off the bottom, then water into the upturned bottle, neck buried into the ground, one or two around each plant. It means the water goes straight to the roots and with the garden well mulched there is no evaporation. I also spray a few special plants that really struggle from heat with Yates Drought Shield on a monthly basis. The same product is used for those salvias that don't like frost. It works for me. Please email or post your hints for sharing.

Stay safe in 2014. Happy gardening, Beth

REMINDER

Just a reminder to everyone that VSSG (Victorian Salvia Study Group) is a branch of the Herb Society of Victoria. The VSSG Committee come from far and wide. We therefore ask that all subscriptions be forwarded to the Subscription Officer only. To go via say the editor of Salvia News, it has to be reposted. Although it will of course be passed on, it takes time and could even mean that an issue of the newsletter be missed. While speaking of subscriptions, remember that a hardcopy of a completed New or Renewal **Subscription form must be forwarded to Meg Gadd, Subscription Officer even if you are paying by direct deposit.** All subscriptions are July to June and renewals are sent out May/June annually. For all subscription enquiries, please contact Meg on telephone (03) 9584 8005 or email: meg_gadd@yahoo.com.au

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March 1 Sat** **Country Women's Association Annual State Fair 9am -2pm**
3 Lansell Rd, Toorak. **Mel: 58 J3, 2M H6**
Salvia plants, books and seed will be for sale
Bring your list, email your list to avoid disappointment. Bring plants to be identified.
CWA stalls, many other garden and refreshments stalls
Guest speaker will be Millie Ross from Gardening Australia.
- March 8/9 Sat/Sun** **Ferny Creek Horticultural Society's**
Annual Plant Collectors Sale & Garden Expo 9 am - 4pm
100 Hilton Rd, Ferny Creek. **Mel: 75 D1**
Salvia plants, books and seeds for sale. Bring your list, bring plants to be identified.
Email your list to avoid disappointment highcon@hotmail.net.au
- March 17 Mon** **Green & Brown Thumbs Garden Club 9.45am Mel: 80 F5**
St John Vianney's Church (near Springvale & Princes Hwy) 23 Police Rd, Mulgrave.
Lyndi will be speaking. Salvia plants and books for sale. Bring plants to be identified.
- March 23 Sun** **Meg Bentley's Open Garden Visit 11am**
4 Fords Rd, Gruyere. **Mel: 285 E3**
Meg is opening her beautiful Salvia, Rose & Herb garden. Have your Salvia Manual signed.
Bring a plate to share, a chair and plants to be identified.
RSVP required Phone Meg if coming phone 0359649372
- March 19 – 23** **Melbourne International Garden Show**
Wed to Sun
VSSG will display on the RHS stand, upper level Royal Exhibition Building
- April 5/6 Sat/Sun** **Tesselaar Gardening & Plant Expo 9am - 4pm**
357 Monbulk Rd Silvan **Mel: 123 B7, F3**
Salvia plants, books and seeds for sale. Bring your list and plants to be identified.
Email your list to avoid disappointment highcon@hotmail.net.au
- April 12 Sat** **Jindivick Rare Plant Fair. 10am - 4pm**
The Jindivick Public Hall, Jackson's Track. **Mel: Touring Map 916, U6**
Salvia plants, book and seeds will be on sale. Many wonderful nurseries and stalls will also feature. Bring your lists and plants to be identified.
Email your list to avoid disappointment highcon@hotmail.net.au
- April 23 Wed** **Mid Week Working Bee at Nobelius 11am – 2pm**
Nobelius Heritage Park, Crighton Ave, Emerald. **Mel: 127 G4**
Bring a plate to share, a chair, gardening tools, a hat, plastic bags for cuttings.
All subscribers welcome.
- May 25 Sun** **Alowyn Gardens 11am**
1210 Melba Hwy, Yarra Valley, 3.5km north of Yarra Glen. **Mel: Touring Map 267 G9**
4 acres of magnificent gardens, parterres, birch forests, edible gardens, a wisteria walk and many other beautiful gardens.
Cafe lunch.
Phone 90834534 to make a booking. \$9.00 admission.
- May 27 Tue** **San Remo Garden Club 10.30am**
San Remo Recreation Centre, Wynne Rd, San Remo. **Mel: Touring Map 934, J/K 8**
Lyndi will be speaking. Bring plants to be identified.
Plants and Salvia Books for sale.
- June 14 Sat** **RHS Conference**
Millers Rd, Mt Waverley Community Centre opposite Train Station. **Mel: 70 E1**
Salvia plants, books and seeds for sale. Large range of plant stalls and products for sale.
Public and subscribers welcome to attend and purchase.
Enquiries, phone Jennifer Rickerby, (03) 53676363

HOT POTS

Pat Anderson, Warrandyte

Why put Salvias in pots in the first place? In theory, they ought to perform much better in the ground - especially those monsters that reach several metres high. But there are many occasions when most of us have Salvias in pots, even if only temporarily; and when this occurs, some caution must be exercised if the plants are to survive. Especially in the extreme conditions of summer.

A common reason for keeping plants in pots is the need for a temporary home for new plants until a garden space is available, while a bed is being altered or if moving house. While a few group members have done the latter recently, I have had to empty out a whole salvia bed recently while we were building a fire bunker/refuge into/under the bed. Those of you who have been to our place will know that we live in an area of high fire risk and that the Warrandyte Bridge causes traffic jams at busy times, making a hasty escape in the event of a fire impossible. We feel good now, knowing that we have our own "Place of last resort" if the worst happens, but the process has certainly added to the load of pot maintenance/watering this summer.

Another common reason for having salvias in pots is that our gardens are just too small for our growing collections of salvias, once the collecting bug has been caught – which seems to be a common phenomenon. Meanwhile, we add to our collections with new plants grown from cuttings or seed and these must be kept in pots until they are big enough to plant out. As a collector, I also like to keep backups of the less-readily-available *Salvia* species in pots in case I lose a plant in the garden and since we live in a frost hollow, I need to keep backups of frost-tender salvias in pots that I can move to the glasshouse in winter.

Then again, we might want a special pot display area in the garden, such as on a verandah, a balcony or near an entrance, and some of you will have seen Trudi's 'Great

Wall of Salvias'. And let's not forget those stalwarts in the group that raise all the plants for our group sales and have acres of pots to deal with.

When salvias are in pots there are several things to watch out for. First and probably foremost, most salvias like a well-drained growing medium, which means one that is loose, doesn't collapse and probably has plenty of grit or perlite. This is especially so for salvias from dry areas and in winter for Chinese and Japanese salvias and those like *S. penstemonoides* with tubers that rot easily in wet conditions. In summer of course when the temperatures go up and the wind blows, pots dry out very quickly and it is important to keep the water up to them. While it is tempting to stand a pot in a saucer of water, this can quickly lead to root rotting and as the plant wilts, we can be tempted to add more water, when what might be required is to lift it out of the saucer and get some air into the medium. Remember that if pots are allowed to dry out too much they may need dunking, otherwise water might just run down the inside of the pots without wetting the growing mix.

Pots need to be large enough to cope with the growing root ball, so re-potting is necessary periodically. You may be able to re-use the same pot by cutting away some of the roots before replanting. Native maxi tubes are good too, because roots grow down straight in them and are air pruned if they protrude out of the bottom.

It is important with pots to maintain nutrient levels in the medium. These get washed out with regular and frequent watering, so apply liquid fertiliser periodically or at least add slow release fertiliser when re-potting.

Finally, in hot weather, it will be necessary to provide some shading for salvias in pots but with some exceptions. Plants with grey/silver
continued on page 6

HOT POTS

continued from page 5

leaves such as *S. apiana* and those from summer dry areas like the Mediterranean (*S. officininalis*), parts of South Africa (*S. aurea*, *S. radula*), Turkey (*S. interrupta*), California (*S. clevelandii*), Arizona etc tend to prefer sun to shade. Such species like good air circulation too. In over-crowded conditions, and with inadequate sun and air circulation, mildew or leaf browning can occur. These same conditions are also conducive to white fly infestations on the larger-leaved salvias.

There are other ways of keeping pots a bit cooler, without water-logging. These include using lighter coloured pots (black absorbs more heat than white), double potting to give an air gap in between and standing pots on wet stones, rather than in water, maybe inside a polystyrene box to shade the pot side.

Some years ago I did some experiments to test the effect of heat on pot size, and to test the effect of pot colour and various shading/cooling strategies on pot temperature. I wrote about this in *Salvia News* back in 2003, but since the readership has grown considerably since then, I thought it might be worth sharing the results again.

What fun I had. I lined up black pots of every available size from 50mm to 200mm, another set of seven 140mm pots of different colour and then some 140mm and 200mm black pots covered in foil, in poly boxes and in poly boxes on wet stones. The pots were all filled to the top with identical potting mix and well watered and left to stand for an hour in the sun (naturally I didn't want to subject my salvias to any experiments). When the shade temperature reached 31^o, I recorded the temperature in all pots, at the same depth, both in the centre of the mix and at the outer edge where the mix was in contact with the plastic. Predictably, the highest temperatures were recorded near the outside of all the black pots, irrespective of size - 54^o!! - and the coolest, outer edge temperatures were recorded with the largest pot on wet stones in the poly box - 34^o. The foil wasn't too bad

either, at 37^o, but then foil is expensive and looks awful. The lighter colours naturally had an effect, but how often do you see white pots and they look awful too. And in any case the outer temperature in the white pot was still 43^o. By the time I had finished this arduous recording process, the ambient shade temperature had reached 34^o, but the temperature in the centre of the potting mix of the 200mm pot standing on wet stones in a poly box was only 31^o. The poly box, incidentally, was one of those broccoli boxes with the taller sides, into which I had made some holes in the side about 2 cms above the bottom, allowing me to keep some water in the bottom with the stones, but not too much.

From all this, it is clear why we can so easily cook our plants' roots in plastic pots on hot days when the plants are already transpiring like mad. This, on top of killing them by waterlogging. What bad mothers we are!

Since learning all this the hard way, my potted Salvias are all doing much better, except that I have so many in pots that I never seem to be on top of the re-potting. My life has also been made a lot easier by having an area with retractable shade cloth. I had seen such a set up in nurseries before, but it wasn't until I went to Renmark with Jillian Barkell and saw how her brother had created such a system, using butterfly clips to hold the shade cloth while allowing a steel cord to pass through the clips, that I was able to bring home details that my dear husband translated into an attractive construction.

NEWS FROM KINGSHOLME IN SOUTHEAST QUEENSLAND

Carol Kerkin / The Perennial Poppies Group Inc.

What a test Mother Nature throws at we gardeners. Here in southeast Queensland late January last year brought flooding rains after months of unseasonable dry. This year we saw days of temperatures soaring to record breaking highs of close to 40 degrees. We are kept on a constant merry-go-round of plants succumbing to one extreme or the other.

We are caught between a rock and a hard place at the moment as this is the time of year that we generally cut back all our large autumn/winter flowering salvias. As we are opening our garden on the Mothers' Day weekend we also had on the 'to-do' list a major maintenance job on the microphyllas and greggiis. Do we go ahead and keep our fingers tightly crossed for milder temps and some vigour inducing rain or do we simply wait it out and hope that when the conditions change it is not too late?

Salvia radula has been a real trooper through these past couple of months. The large arrow-shaped hairy leaves are beautiful in themselves with the added bonus of large spikes of clear white flowers held above. Ours tends to throw out long arms but this isn't a problem as it is growing in a mixed border and the surrounding plants seem to offer support.

S 'African Sky' seems to never be without flower which makes it difficult to know when to take to it with the snips. As the branches get weighted down with the flowers the underside of the skirt tends to suffer with the humidity of the summer and this gives us the indication that 'now is the time' so we bite the bullet and forfeit the flowers if only for a few weeks.

S 'Embers Wish' is proving to be just as good a performer as her cousin *S 'Wendy's Wish'* in both growth and flower. We find that it doesn't tend to sulk in the heat as quickly and, being only a young plant, hasn't had a major haircut as yet. Fingers crossed for another salvia to be added to the ever-growing list of definite tried and true performers for our part of the world.

Another new addition to our collection is *Salvia 'Amistad'*. At first I was a little unsure as it was very close to *S 'Purple Majesty'*, with the leaves a bit more lime and a dark backing to the bright blue/purple flowers. But upon putting it into the garden situation it has certainly earned its spot growing robustly and rewarding us with a wonderful parade of non-stop blooms.

A new 'Heatwave' (Brilliance) was purchased on a visit to Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers back in September. This is always a full day out for us two hour drive either way) and includes a mix of garden visiting and nursery retail therapy, with there being little spare room in the car on the way home.

I was drawn to the plant mainly because of the colour of the flower depicted on the label, and knowing that a lot of the 'Heatwaves' do well for us, decided it was worth a trial. When the first flowers appeared a couple of weeks later they weren't exactly as expected but I certainly wasn't disappointed. We shall keep a close eye on it and if it continues to perform as it has so far I think we will be adding more of this particular plant to the cottage areas in our garden.

Must stop my 'Salvia Waffling' now and see if I can cross something else off that never-ending list.

Happy Gardening, Carol

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NOTES FROM GRUYERE: JANUARY 2014

Meg Bentley, Gruyere Vic

So far our summer has been very kind to us and to the gardens. Mornings have been cool and the birds in our bush-land awaken and sing their little hearts out with the dawn chorus, especially the wrens, honeyeaters and yellow robins. All have had successful nestings in the dense foliage salvias, buddleija and up in various eucalypts. It is a wonderful sight to see the young birds feeding on the nectar of the salvias or getting insects or watching the family of wrens hopping across the dewy grass in the mornings.

The air is filled with the perfume of liliiums, buddleja, roses and heliotrope, what a joy to see them flowering amongst the salvias. Colour co-ordination has worked out very well amongst the roses and salvias, although not always planned it turns out quite complimentary. The golden blooms of the taller rose 'Graham Thomas' have performed well beside *salvias* 'aurea', *semitrata*, *mexicana* 'Bill Whitehead', *apiana* and *canariensis alba*. On the opposite side of the path is the climbing rose 'Cecile Brunner' with arms out-stretched, encompassing the lower growing salvias like the pale apricot S. Heatwave 'Glow', 'Indigo Spires', Heatwave 'Glimmer', *S. azurea*, Rose 'Pierre Ogur', S. 'Pink Zapper (bright magenta) *S. lavandulifolia*, 'Sweet Laura', *nemerosa* cultivars with spikes of purple, violet and blue. Growing amongst these along the edge of the garden path is bright green Guava scented pelargonium.

Salvia 'Timboon' creates a very good back-drop for the rose 'Maria Callas' with a similar colouring of deep burgundy and a light magenta shade with *S. curviflora* nearby. Buddleija 'Lochinch' with its pale purple blooms makes a good foil for Salvias 'Violet Eyes', 'Magenta Magic', 'Omaha Gold' *microphylla cyclamen*, 'Jane's Delight', 'jamensis yellow' and the soft tones of *Salvia melissodora*.

Further along the pathway grows a mixture of herbs, roses and salvias: some of these salvias are known to be used medicinally, *S. sclarea*, *S. miltiorrhiza*, *S. bowleyana*, *S. repens*, *S. namaensis*, *S. lavandulifolia* and *S. officinalis*. Agastache 'Lemon Frost' grows very well in this bed with lemon-yellow flowers mingling with the blue of *S. officinalis* and purple of *S. miltiorrhiza* but the Lemon Balm tries to take over. The taller features here are the Apothecary Rose and R. Quatre Season which blend beautifully with Indegophora indica, the Indigo Dye plant with its bright pink racemes of pea-like flowers. *Salvia* 'Celestial Blue', Lavender and Winter Savory add fragrance and contrast to the bright orange marigolds *Calendula officinalis*.

Down the main lawn area we have the 'Central Pond' which features Acers, Magnolia 'Little Gem' dwarf *Abelia grandiflora* hedging with spikes of Lavender 'Grosso' and blue Iris, all looking at its best this year. There are many other garden areas, not mentioned here but can be seen when the Salvia Study Group comes to visit in March, everyone is most welcome of course and it will be "bring lunch to share" as we usually do and tea and coffee will be provided.

See notices for exact date when and where.

Editor's Note:

Visit Meg Bentley's open garden on Sunday 23 March.

4 Fords Road, Gruyere. Mel: 285 E3

More details page 4 this issue, Calendar of Events or www.salvias.org.au

Look forward to seeing you there!

TRIP DOWN SOUTH –

Annette Bax, Townsville, Qld.



Salvias at Janell's place

After arriving in Melbourne and quickly diving for my jumper that was the first difference. I live in the tropics and the weather is hot and hotter lol, I went to visit Janell's garden in Paschendale, Janell grows nothing but salvias, I observed her salvias and the biggest difference was the colour in leaves, my salvias mainly have lime green leaves, this does not vary much. One thing I found bizarre was the differences between our *canariensis* var *candidissima*. Janell's had the furry grey stems whereas mine is grey all over. Now I would have thought that it should have been the opposite, flowers remained the same overall. A majority of Janell's salvias were in flower and it was a smorgasboard of salvias, Sublime!!!

The weather on the first day at Janell's was wind, rain, sun, wind, rain, sun and it was so cold. Luckily salvias are so tolerant and forgive our respective weathers. The rest of the trip's weather was pleasant.

I don't get a lot of the Turkish salvias to flower here and hardly grow them as they hate the constant humidity that goes with a lot of the Mediterranean sages as well, they reluctantly flower here. I did manage to see *salvia palaestina* in flower at Gai Walsh's place at Casterton, it was a beautiful sample of it and so pretty. Gai has a big property that meanders on and on. It was so relaxing there and so many gorgeous salvias blooming their hearts out. *Salvia* 'Chateau Cathare'

was flowering at Janell's as was *bowleyana*, *indica*, *hierosolymitana*, *sclarea* var *turkestanica*, *desoleana*, *austriaca* and *tingitana* to name a few. I have never seen the flowers and I had a ball taking photos for my Flickr. I do grow most of the salvias mentioned but they are not in the same league as my Victorian counterparts.



Salvia palaestina at Gai's place

After leaving Janell's and visiting Gai's place, I headed back to Melbourne to meet up with Pat Anderson's and visit her lovely garden at Warrandyte. Here salvias are placed in the beds where they are native to. It is so



Salvia schlechteri at Pat's place

organised and I enjoyed seeing *salvia schlechteri* in flower there, it is the most

TRIP DOWN SOUTH

beautiful sage. I saw *salvia columbariae*, *carduacea*, *cyanescens*, *ionocalyx*, *ringens*, *interrupta* to name a few in flower. It was great seeing them in flower, as the closest I have ever come to seeing the flowers was via google.



Salvia greggii 'Peaches and cream' at Pat's place



Salvia paramiltiorhizza at Meg's place

Pat and I headed off to Gruyere to visit Meg Bentley's place. It is so peaceful there and again I got to see some new salvias in flower; *salvia paramiltiorhizza*, *nanchuanensis*, 'Coral Delight', the *gesneriiflora*'s were humongous there. I have heard of Meg and it was a pleasure to meet her and visit her garden. The salvia that took on the appearance as a tree and was in flower was *salvia ombrophila*, it was so pretty. I have grown this one before and it carks it before it flowers. To see it growing like a tree was

something that I will always remember. On Sunday it was off to meet everyone at the Christmas do at Patrick's place, Patrick has done well, his garden is well established and in so short of time. It was great to meet people that I know their names but no faces, especially the ones that I always nag about getting seeds...so after stuffing my face with all that yummy food, Pat and I headed off to the Nobelius salvia display garden. It was well kept and so many salvias in flower, you do a great job with that display, it was gorgeous letting all those salvias grow together and flowers everywhere, very nice, I did take pics there too. I took close to a 1000 photos whilst away so a lot of sorting to go through.



Salvia amplifrons at Jillian's place

We ducked into Jillian's place on the way back where it is a wooded garden. Let me tell you *salvia amplifrons* and *ionocalyx* were the best samples I have ever seen growing in complete shade must be the answer to their success.

I would like to take the time to thank you all for sharing your gardens with me and taking the time to show me around. I had the bestest time and really enjoyed everyone's salvia gardens. To see them growing and flowering just inspires me to grow even more new ones and send them southbound so that they can thrive in Victoria. Keep up the good work ladies and gents, it is most impressive.....next time I visit I will take more time down there and see if it is possible to see more salvias..... I wish everyone a Happy New Salvia year!

IN DEFENCE OF COMMON PLANTS

Geoff Crowhurst – Thornbury Vic

Considering Melbourne's extremely variable weather from season to season, I don't mind growing plants that are tough and don't need much attention, though I draw a line at the ubiquitous Iceberg rose and Forget-me-nots, but allow Seaside Daisy to fill the crack between front wall and footpath. Red geraniums, well they are everywhere in southern Europe in window boxes and hanging baskets, so they make up part of the scene. Why not grow them here too? After gas main renewal wrecked some of the nature strip planting I look after next door, I have put in Euryops, Diosma, Lavender and Rosemary, all common but tough, with the added bonus of apparently being unattractive to a local plant thief.

As far as salvias go, I take a bit of extra trouble with a few kinds, but if some expire in a heat wave or while I am away on holiday, or for some other (unknown) reason, then they don't get another go. Once I had a *S. cyanescens* from Lambley Nursery that grew well and flowered in a moderate sized pot, but then gave up the ghost. RIP. The same story applied to *S. canescens* (probably *var. daghestanica*), which did flower nicely, but later keeled over. I have probably lost count of the salvias which had a chance, but for me didn't take it. I feel there is only so far one can go to replicate the natural growing conditions of plants, with some much more adaptable to different conditions than others. For some, like Turkish species described by Pat Anderson, it seems a complete lottery.

I notice a number of salvias around my area, some in gardens that are little tended, and others where there is a keen gardener. Once established, *S. 'Anthony Parker'* seems as tough as old boots, and gives good value over quite a long period when not much else is in flower. This spring I have noticed the all purple form of *S. leucantha* making a really good display, and of course all you have to do is chop it down once a year. *S. 'Huntington Red'* and *S. involucrata 'Bethellii'* appear

elsewhere and both would have to be included in the dead easy to grow category. In one garden *S. 'Wendy's Wish'* grows right out in the open, making it a more compact plant, but I doubt it gets much water in dry times.

S. 'Hot Lips' would have to be the ultimate plant for the non-gardener. A neighbour a few doors up wanted two planted on the nature strip, where they grow under and either side of a Brush Box, and flower for most of the year, with just a hard trim from hedge shears from time to time. On my own nature strip, salvias '*Marine Blue*', *africana*, '*African Skies*' have grown into each other, smothering any weeds, and with a Catmint edging look good for long periods. I remember seeing *S. scabra* making a nice small hedge at Elly Roos' some years ago. Like other South Africans, it is almost indestructible, though needing fairly frequent clipping with hedge shears to keep it flowering. It is another good nature strip plant for me.

Out the back I have a range of *S. microphylla* hybrids, all very good value in a small garden, with a recent unnamed addition from Bunnings almost certainly the dusky mauve *Mesa Azure*, looking very good at the moment in between Musk Pink and Glimmer. In my small middle bed, *S. muiirii* needs to be chopped back hard from time to time to keep it small enough. I really like the extra tough *S. coahuilensis* for edging spots and filling in small spots. Its purple colour and fragrant leaves are both refreshing. When volunteering out at the Alister Clark Memorial Rose Garden at Bulla I planted this as an edging for one of the beds, and it has made an excellent border, spilling onto a gravel path.

Of the salvias considered a bit more problematic, *S. patens* varieties continue to do well for me, and I think I have all available except for the larger growing royal blue one, with nowhere to put it. Having been cut down in winter, they spring up strongly each spring. I am probably lucky to have a sheltered spot for them. They get a mulch of old sheep

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INTROUDUCING MEG'S NEWS SALVIA CARDS

At last, Meg Bentley's Salvia Cards are available. So many who have seen her work have asked where they may purchase her drawings. You too may have seen her exquisite work in displays and of course her book 'A Manual for Salvia Growers'. There are five different designs featuring *Salvia patens*, *Salvia microphylla var neurepia*, *Salvia roemeriana*, *Salvia gesneraeflora* 'Tequila', and *Salvia leucantha*. The cards come in packs of 5 single flower, or 5 assorted Salvia Cards together with envelopes for only \$10 per pack and are available at the different VSSG venues as advertised in the Calendar of Events in Salvia News or on the Website. A must have for all Salvia enthusiasts and of course make great gifts. Would also look great framed and on display. Don't forget that Meg is having her Open Garden Day at Gruyere for Salvia News subscribers at 11am on 23 March 2014. Meg will be available to sign your purchased manuals. Look forward to seeing you there.



Meg Bentley with new Salvia Cards

IN DEFENCE OF COMMON PLANTS – Geoff Crowhurst

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manure, and apart from watering in dry times, the only extra attention needed is a spray if caterpillars take a liking to their soft leaves. So there you have it. I would probably be described as a gardening fanatic, but believe I am also realistic and pragmatic about the plants I grow. As memory of the recent long drought begins to fade, we could forget that during that difficult time it was the tough and also often common plants which reminded us

gardening was still worthwhile. However much we might fuss over some plants, the real backbone of our gardens needs to be plants that will be there for the long haul. That doesn't mean we need to plant pittosporum hedges, standard ficus, phormium (NZ flax) and similar plants which are so often plonked around newly built apartment blocks. Happy gardening!

CORRECTION TO BE NOTED

The mauve *Salvia mexicana* plant you may have planted, may have been labelled with incorrect spelling and it should be noted that *Salvia Mexicana* 'Kieran' is spelt with an 'a' in Kieran. This plant was named after Annette Bax's son, you may remember reading her letter in the last newsletter. Don't forget to correct. Apologies to anyone who may have received incorrect labelling.

NOBELIUS HERITAGE PARK SALVIA SNAP A WINNER!

Patrick Hogan



Photograph courtesy of Kevin Teasdale:

Kevin Teasdale's winning picture of the Eastern Spinebill at Nobelius Salvia Garden

Well known Emerald resident and tireless worker for the local area Mr Kevin Teasdale photographed the above photo at the Salvia beds at Emerald recently. Kevin entered the photograph in a Calender competition and was delighted to be awarded First prize. Kevin received \$500 as first prize from Bendigo Bank and the photograph will appear in the 2014 calendar.

The bird, an Eastern Spinebill is common throughout the Salvia plantation and it is not unusual to see large numbers enjoying the nectar of the Salvias.

The Title of Kevin's picture is "Welcome to Nobelius Heritage Park". Kevin is a tireless worker for all things to do with Emerald and has been involved with Nobelius Heritage Park and Museum for many years. Well done Kevin and keep up the good work.

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PROPAGATION DAY AT NOBELIUS: October, 2013

Meg Bentley

Although this very interesting day was held at a time between 'Newsletters' it applies even now as Autumn approaches and there is still time to propagate plants.

Our guest for the day was Sue Stevens who, as a chief propagator of Australian Native plants, was going to demonstrate her methods which can also be applied to salvias and other plants. Quite a number of members turned up on such a good sunny day and we walked around the Salvia Collection picking out salvias that some found difficult to propagate. Sue would demonstrate how she would strike these salvias and ones she had no trouble in striking, proved quite difficult to others, so it was a tremendous help.

The best method Sue found was to discard all 'soft' tip growth and go for firmer stems with only one node needed to strike roots: cut off lower leaves then scratch the side of the stem below the node (just to wound it) but not tearing into the stem which creates an open wound allowing rot or fungal problems to set in. Sue then went on to demonstrate how she strikes native plants and brought along a great range of native plant material, many in flower and some propagating medium.

For her propagating mix Sue used perlite type/styrene balls and peat mixed together, dampened down into a 30cm square tray.

Using a special tool (made by her hubby) with arms that sit on the edge of the tray and a bar that 'cuts' onto the propagating medium (much like a very broad T shape) cutting a fine line across the tray, enabling a row of plant material to be inserted without the use of a 'dibber' stick making individual holes. Sue finds this a great way to go since she propagates hundreds of native plant cuttings at a time.

(This tool can be seen in the photo where Sue has inserted a row of *Banksia ericifolia* using very short stems) Cuttings are inserted into the mix up to the lowest leaves: larger cuttings would have perhaps one node into the mix whereas smaller stems may have two nodes. No rooting hormone was used, this is used mainly on hard to strike cutting, said Sue.



Propagation Day with Sue Stevens

Another difficulty that was addressed by Sue was the hard to strike 'hollow stemmed' salvias, these were best taken with some of the older wood at the base or 'firm' stems where the growth was not so 'sappy' and soft. These salvias include *S. apiana*, *involutrata* cultivars and *S. madrensis*.

Always label your plants as you go and keep them moist but not wet and keep them in the shade. While Sue recommended misting the cuttings, we as a group don't have these facilities but I would personally recommend using a sprayer used for indoor plants which gives a fine misting spray. This propagating medium can dry out very fast if moisture is not kept up. I found that the best method was to place your pot of cuttings into a slightly larger pot with a layer of potting mix in the bottom (similar to double potting) and the moisture holds better and this layer also helps to draw down the roots and if you are in very hot areas (like me) I find it easier to add a little potting mix to the perlite which also helps to hold some moisture without over-wetting.

Always place the cuttings in the shade, either under a tree or in some protected area out of the sun and wind and always label the cuttings.

After the demonstration many people were eager to pot up their salvia cuttings that were collected earlier and set to on an adjoining table to take home with them. Pots and soil mix were supplied.

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PROPAGATING DAY AT NOBELIUS – Meg Bentley

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Patrick took some excellent photos of the work in progress as we can see in this article (many thanks Patrick!) all was followed by refreshments of tea /coffee, cake and biscuits and the afternoon was much enjoyed by all.

Sue was presented with gifts and salvias with many thanks from the Salvia Study Group in appreciation for her efforts.

VSSG ANNUAL REPORT 2013

Lyndi Garnet, VSSG Co-ordinator

This year has been another very busy and successful year for the group which began in March with a good selling weekend at Ferny Creek's Garden Expo and another extremely busy weekend in April at Tesselaar's where we almost sold out. A few weeks later saw us at the Jindivick Festival which was extremely windy for those vendors who were outside, but we did very well as we were inside, snug and warm, next to the refreshment area!

May was quieter with a few garden visits to beautiful well nurtured gardens, everyone was impressed and went home with plenty of ideas for their own gardens. A well attended Plant Identification day in June showed the differences in very similar looking Salvias, so that people were able to go home and identify the plants in their own gardens.

I'm surprised we did as well as we did for our annual selling day at Nobelius as it was very cold and extremely windy, it was all we could do just to keep the pots on the tables, but for all that, people turned up and we sold quite a lot of Salvias.

September was Pakenham Garden Expo, always a very good one day sell for the group, where we almost sold out.

The Spring Festival in September at Redhill was a great success, so much better than last year where it was freezing and rained out.

October was especially busy with our Propagation Day, which saw a professional propagator show us some of the tricks of her trade, from the propagating mix and trays to techniques for taking cuttings. Everyone was in awe as to how quickly she was preparing cuttings and placing them into trays.

It was only last weekend when we were at Jindivick to visit a magnificent garden on the side of a hill that had been landscaped beautifully in the traditional format of terraces with masses of roses everywhere, rare trees hiding vistas and dotted with so many unusual plants, that it proved to be quite an identification day for those who knew their plants.

November is the Rose Show, which was a huge success, in fact the best we've done so far. The last event in our Calendar was our Christmas lunch at Patrick's home, where all subscribers were invited to join us celebrate the year and meet old friends. It was a great celebration of seeing new and old faces all enjoying themselves.

Now we have to restock our pots, ready to go again for another year.

LETTERS

Salvias are Addictive

In the beginning...

Last year the Open Garden scheme advertised an open weekend at the Anderson Garden. It was there that my eyes were opened to the Salvia world. Since then, I have got to know the staff at the local Bunnings Nursery and they point out new Salvias as they acquire them. As a result, my small garden looked very colourful last summer and spring with the Salvia additions. In fact, *Salvia splendens* 'Van Houttii' flowered throughout winter and is still in flower. The Salvia hybrid 'Wendy's Wish' also flowered throughout winter up until the start of spring. I have appreciated these Salvias displaying their lovely flowers, as they have brightened up the bleak winter days. The Salvia hybrids 'Heatwave Glow' and 'Indigo Spires' were a picture throughout Autumn.

Not so long ago I came upon *Salvia leucantha* 'Santa Barbara' which is a lovely show.

Salvia 'Hot Lips' and Pineapple Sage also seem to like my sandy soil. A few cuttings from my Salvias were placed in a vase on the kitchen shelf, but these did not send out any roots unfortunately.

However, with growing enthusiasm and curiosity, I googled 'Salvias' on the computer. The Victorian Salvia Study Group came to light and informed me of a working bee at the Nobelius Heritage Park in the distant suburb of Emerald, a world away from my beachside region. After visiting my 'out of date' Melways, one Wednesday in winter I made the adventurous journey over the Westgate to Wellington Road and hour later arrived in the lovely region of Emerald. By late that morning I was at work clearing away dead autumn leaves and planting new Salvias. The winter sun shone and the company was cheerful. Jillian and Lyndi shared their knowledge with us as well as a number of cuttings. I left Nobelius garden after a lovely day out and although the peak hour traffic resulted in a two hour journey home to Altona, I had much to reflect on and a number of cuttings too. I look forward to seeing the results of my efforts, both in my own garden and at the Nobelius Park on my next visit.

To those wishing to know more about Salvias, I would recommend a visit to the garden on a working Wednesday, but remind visitors that a contribution to the communal lunch is encouraged.

Barbara Busk-Christensen
Altona Vic

Editor's Note: Welcome to the addictive world of Salvias, Barbara. Thankyou for sharing with us all. Just a reminder that Lyndi and Jillian work on the display garden at Nobelius fortnightly. If you are interested give Lyndi a ring to check time and other details. The next Working Bee at Nobelius is Wednesday 23 April, details in the Calendar of Events in this edition of Salvia News and on the VSSG website www.salvias.org.au Just a reminder that only a very few of the many hundreds of Salvias available can be bought at nurseries. Check the Calendar of Events regularly and mark your own calendar/ diary to attend events, many having Salvias for sale. VSSG will be at the Ferny Creek Garden Expo 8 and 9 March.

Trip to the UK

Editor: Barbara Wickes has been telling me about "taking 47 of our members to UK and Ireland in July? Leave on 13th - 18 days in southern England and 11 in southern Ireland". She has organised the whole trip herself and I asked if she would be sharing more through the newsletter on their return. Sounds like a great trip. For those who don't know, Barbara is the President of the Perennial Poppy Group in Qld. and a long time salvia enthusiast who arranges for an article from SE Queensland for each edition of Salvia News. Thankyou Barb.

Regarding our trip in July, we are visiting Great Comp garden in Kent which is run by William Dyson (Salvia 'Silas Dyson' comes from there and named after his son) www.greatcomparden.co.uk We will also be visiting Peter Wadeley at Prospect House at Axminster, East Devon who has a collection of more than 200 salvias.

LETTERS

The garden was seen on BBC Gardeners' World recently.

I thought I should mention that some of the salvias Dulcie Adam mentioned (Salvia News from South East Queensland – Salvia News Summer 2013/2014) are seedlings from

Wanda Hirth from up here. Sandra V, Angel Wings, Little Diva and Easter Bonnet.

Barbara Wickes
Buderim Qld

SALVIA CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON 2013



We enjoyed a lovely day at the home of Patrick and Eileen Hogan just prior to Christmas. There was a good turnout and it's always great to get together catching up with others who have the same addiction of Salvias, old friends and new. Pat Anderson brought along Annette Bax from Townsville, Queensland who was the writer of a letter in the last Salvia News and it was great to meet her. As always, the fare was excellent, Eileen's Christmas pudding was exceptional as was her Christmas cake. Patrick and Eileen's daughters played hostesses and everyone was well looked after.

Lyndi thanked Patrick and Eileen and the girls for having us. She also thanked the Committee for their tireless work throughout the year, Irene who retired during the year as Treasurer for all her time given to VSSG. Before going further, Pat stood up on behalf of everyone and thanked Lyndi as Co-ordinator for all that she does day in and day out for VSSG and everyone applauded. Lyndi reminded everyone that it was a great time to visit the Salvia Display Garden at Nobelius Heritage Park in Emerald as it is in full flower. She then gave an overview of the

year past, and what was coming in the year ahead.

Changes have been made to the website with even more information for those interested including a 'Differences Page', showing how you can pick the differences for very similar Salvias.



Photographs taken by Patrick Hogan

The rain held off long enough for everyone to have a look around Patrick's lovely garden. The front garden is well established and is quite spectacular crammed with something to delight every gardener. He tells us that he completely re landscaped his back garden while going through chemo earlier in the year – now that is dedication – and the results speak for themselves!

Patrick's entertainment room opens onto a verandah overlooking the back garden and both areas were utilised by the Group. Several large frames containing a number of photos of the one subject adorn the walls of the entertaining room that stop you in your tracks, absolutely fabulous!

It was a special day and we all went home with a couple of potted Salvias too.

Thankyou Patrick, Eileen and family for a great day!

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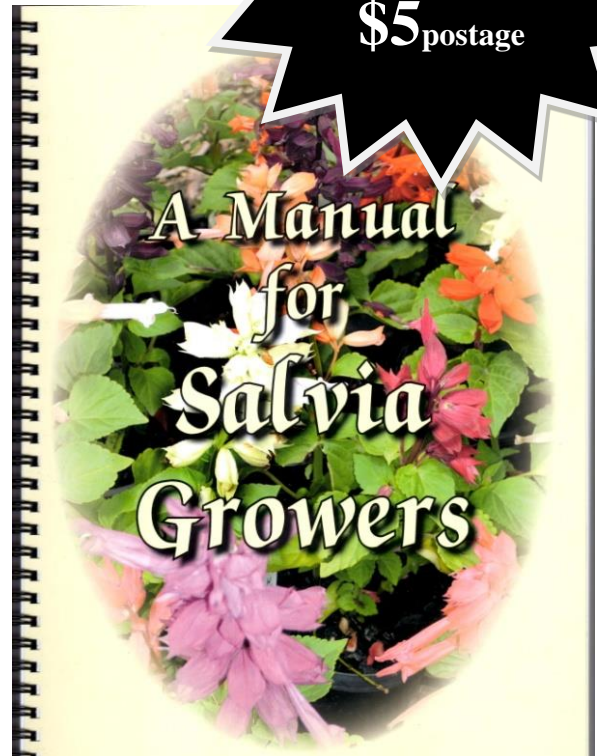
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