

from the world to your garden...



...the genus *Salvia*

Salvia: from the Latin word meaning "I heal" or "safe", referring to the medicinal qualities of some species. Sometimes known as sage or clary, this is a large genus containing both annual and perennial species many of which come from California and tropical America, although there are a few of European origin.

Salvias are members of the mint family, Labiatae, and can be recognized from their square stems and opposite pairs of leaves, which are usually rather velvety or hairy. A familiar salvia is the perennial common garden sage (*Salvia officinalis*). Salvias for the flower garden include many perennials and annuals. The colourful *Salvia splendens* and *Salvia farinacea* are tender perennials treated as annuals for example.

The genus *Salvia* contains at least 900 species and, because they readily cross pollinate, many interspecific hybrids - both natural and manmade. Salvias are found on most continents. Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist, wrote about their healing qualities back in the first century. In the early 17th century, the English botanist John Gerard, in his famous Herbal, described a number of sages, referring to the healing powers of these herbs. Until the 19th century most gardeners focused on growing plants for medicinal or culinary purposes; beauty was a secondary, much less important, consideration.

The results of plant exploration in the 18th and 19th centuries brought many new salvias to English and European gardeners from Mexico, China, and Africa. One, *Salvia buechananii*, was found in Mexico by an Englishwoman, who gave it to a man serving in the army. He in turn brought it back to England and gave it to an English squire named Buchanan. Many such stories accompanied salvias across the ocean. *Salvia coccinea*, indigenous to Mexico and South America, was grown for decades as a wildflower. Both *Salvia splendens* (scarlet sage) and *Salvia farinacea* (mealy cup sage) were discovered in the early 1800's, the former in Brazil, the latter in Texas.

Seed of the majority needs sowing early in the year. Germination is often slow and erratic, especially if a fairly warm temperature is not maintained – around 18°C seems to be ideal. If at least 15°C is not possible do not sow before March. Prick off the seedlings as appropriate. For best results the next move should be to pots, increasing the size of these according to growth. From the larger pots, move the plants to outdoor positions at the end of May

or early June after hardening off: As necessary take out the growing points to encourage bushy growth.

Additional variety descriptions and more species will be added over time. If you have a special interest in Salvia or a particular requirement [contact us](#).

Salvia carduacea forms a rosette of thistle-like greenish leaves, well armed with spines. Sometimes known as the Thistle Sage, it produces heads or whorls of lavender flowers. This species can be sown outdoors in spring or autumn.

Salvia columbariae is another salvia with whorls of bright blue flowers but needs sowing under glass.

Salvia farinacea although perennial is more often treated as an annual. It produces long spikes of violet blue flowers and has a number of good forms such as Blue Bedder and Royal Blue, both with deep blue flowers, and Alba, white.

Salvia grahami (microphylla) is also grown as an annual having crimson blooms, while some variations bear white, purple or carmine flowers.

Salvia horminum is deservedly popular for sowing directly into flowering positions. Its decorative value lies in the colourful bracts surrounding the tiny flowers. A number of different varieties are available with bracts of pink, purple, blue and white, all being valuable for indoor display. A balanced colour mixture is offered by [packetseeds.com](#).



Salvia splendens is the well known scarlet sage from Brazil and the original species from which the well known bedding salvias have been developed. The stout branching stems bear many showy flower spikes. The type species as well as some of the varieties are inclined to be rather late flowering, meaning a short life when they are used for summer bedding. Some of the named varieties now available are earlier flowering. The varieties offered by [packetseeds.com](#) are of the **Sizzler** series.