Salvia: An Old Standby and Promising Newcomer

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Salvia L. is a large genus comprised of about 900 species of annual, biennial, or perennial herbs, subshrubs, or shrubs (Griffiths, 1994). Over 140 species are used as garden plants, culinary and medicinal herbs, cut flowers, and for habitat gardening (Griffiths, 1994). Salvia, the Latin name for this group of plants, also functions as a common name and is presumably derived from salus meaning well, safe, or sound; referring to the plant’s medicinal uses. The common name for most species in the genus Salvia is sage and is usually preceded by at least one modifier, such as common sage (S. officinalis L.), or Mexican bush sage (S. leucantha Cav.). A few salvia species are known as clary (S. sclarea L.), meadow clary (S. pratensis L.), and wild clary (S. verbenaca L.) and at least two have neither clary nor sage in the common name: Jupiter’s-distaff (S. glutinosa L.), and cancerweed (S. lyrata L.) (Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, 1976). Clary also has its linguistic roots in the plant’s usage; S. sclarea was used for afflictions of the eye and therefore called clear-eye or clary (Stearn, 1992).

Salvia is the largest genus in the family Labiatae (Lamiaceae), the mint family (Clebsch, 1997; Griffiths, 1994). Like many members of the mint family, salvas are characterized by square stems (cross section), opposite leaves, flowers formed in false whorls (verticillasters), and aromatic foliage. Salvia flowers are disposed in terminal or axillary racemes, spikes, panicles, or cymes. The calyx has two lips, the lower deeply two-toothed, the upper three-toothed. The corolla is also two-lipped, the upper hooded, erect or plane and the lower spreading with three lobes. Salvia is also characterized by having two stamens, included or excerted, and fruit containing four ovoid, three-angled nutlets (Griffiths, 1994; Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, 1976). hummingbirds, bees, bumblebees, and bee flies harvest nectar from salvias and thereby act as pollinators (Boring et al., 1995).

Some species, such as scarlet sage (S. splendens Sell ex Roem. & Schult.), are perennial herbs in their native habitat but are used as annuals in temperate climates. Additionally, melaleuca sage (S. farinacea Benth.) is a perennial herb in its native Mexico and southern Texas but is grown as an annual throughout the more temperate regions of the United States. Such plants are sometimes referred to as tender perennials or as half hardy perennials (Armitage, 1989).

Although of cosmopolitan distribution, salvias are generally characterized as growing in dry or stony soils (Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, 1976). One notable exception is bog sage (S. uliginosa Benth.), which is native to wet soils in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina (Griffiths, 1994).

Although about 140 species are in cultivation, only a few salvias are commonly found in commerce and gardens. Common sage is a culinary herb grown for commercial herb production, home kitchen use, and as decorative foliage in the garden. The chromosome number for this species is 2n = 14 (Goldblatt and Johnson, 1998). There is an extensive literature, mostly from Europe, on the chemical composition, production, and extraction of essential oils from common sage and related species (Serrato-Valenti et al., 1997) but these topics will not be covered in this review.

Scarlet sage, one of the leading 25 bedding plants. Much of the literature on ornamental production of salvia focuses on scarlet sage (2n = 44, Goldblatt and Johnson, 1996) and thus many references discuss salvia without distinguishing between species. Melaleuca cup sage (2n = 18, Goldblatt and Johnson, 1990), a native of the southwestern United States, is used for bedding or in a mixed border. As native plant gardening increases in popularity, the number of salvia species found in commerce increases but most of the scientific literature has focused on the species mentioned above.

Cultivar development

Of the ornamental salvias, cultivar development has been most extensive for scarlet sage. Novartis Seeds (Downers Grove, Ill.) and PanAmerican Seed Co. (West Chicago, Ill.) have contributed to cultivar development for this species. Dwarf cultivars, such as those in the Sizzler series, flower in the pack yet tend to develop leaf scorch and pigment bleaching during high summer temperatures. Cultivars like ‘Vista’ and ‘Empire’ may not flower in time for spring sales but are superior garden plants showing greater tolerance of summer heat and sun. Color also affects leaf scorch: purple, burgundy, rose, and red cultivars are scorch resis-
tant, while white (white cultivars of scarlet sage tend to be cream-colored), salmon, and bicolor cultivars tend to develop leaf scorch (Armitage, 1994; J. Nau, personal communication).

**CROP PRODUCTION**

Production of scarlet sage requires high light. Supplemental photosynthetic lighting of seedlings accelerates development and limits excessively leggy growth (Armitage, 1994), but photoperiod requirements for flowering are cultivar dependent. Carlson (1978) suggested three categories for the photoperiod response of scarlet sage cultivars: 1) cultivars that flower faster under short days (facultative short day plants), 2) cultivars that flower in the same length of time under either long or short days (day neutral plants), and 3) cultivars that flower faster under long days (facultative long day plants). Of 44 cultivars studied, Carlson found 18 to be quantitative short day, 11 to be day neutral, and 14 to be quantitative long day plants (one cultivar did not flower at all). Recommended photoperiod length for optimum production can vary by cultivar and with temperature: Weiler (1972) and Weiler and Lai (1973) reported ‘St. John's Fire’ to be day neutral when grown at either 75°F (24°C) or 60°F (16°C) while Carlson (1978) listed it as a long day plant when grown at 70 to 75°F (21 to 24°C). ‘St. John’s Fire’ had an increased response to daylength at 75°F (24°C) over 60°F (16°C) indicating that temperature may account for differences in reported photoperiod requirements (Weiler, 1972).

Mexican bush sage is a short day plant that flowers in autumn (Armitage, 1993). This perennial herb, native to Mexico and tropical America, requires long days and warm temperatures for vegetative growth and short days and warm temperatures for flower initiation and development. Mexican bush sage can be grown as a cut flower in 11 to 15 weeks by providing 3 to 5 weeks of long days followed by 8 to 10 weeks of short days (Armitage, 1993). Scarlet sage, Texas salvia (Salvia coccinea Juss. ex Murray.), and mealycup sage should be grown at 57 to 59°F (14 to 15°C), while scarlet sage grows best with night temperatures of 55 to 59°F (13 to 15°C) and day temperatures of 70 to 75°F (21 to 24°C) (Armitage, 1994).

Scarlet sage responded strongly to a difference between day and night temperatures (DIF), a response that can be used to regulate plant height (Barrett and Erwin, 1994). Internode length was greatest for scarlet sage with a cooler night than day temperature (DIF = +6°F [+3.3°C]), was intermediate with a constant temperature, and shortest with a higher night than day temperature (DIF = -5°F [-2.8°C]). Using temperature to reduce internode

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**Table 1. Salvia species and their landscape characteristics (Boring et al., 1995; Clausen and Ekstrom, 1989; Clebsch, 1997; Griffiths, 1994; Still, 1994; Wasowski and Wasowski, 1997).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>Ht (m)</th>
<th>Native habitat</th>
<th>Propagation mode</th>
<th>Flower color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas salvia, tropical sage</td>
<td>Salvia coccinea</td>
<td>2–3 (0.6–0.9)</td>
<td>South Carolina to Mexico</td>
<td>Seed or cuttings</td>
<td>Red, pink, or rarely white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorri sage, purple sage, desert sage</td>
<td>Salvia dorrii</td>
<td>2–3 (0.6–0.9)</td>
<td>Desert-southwest U.S.</td>
<td>Seed or cuttings</td>
<td>Tubular blue flowers nestled in pink to violet bracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealycup sage</td>
<td>Salvia farinacea</td>
<td>1–2 (0.3–0.6)</td>
<td>Texas and Mexico</td>
<td>Seed or cuttings</td>
<td>Lavender-blue or white flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg sage, autumn sage, cherry sage</td>
<td>Salvia gregii</td>
<td>2–3 (0.6–0.9)</td>
<td>Texas and Mexico</td>
<td>Cuttings</td>
<td>Red, pink, white, or coral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ode length is most effective if the temperature drop (DROP) is rapid, occurs at sunrise, and during high light intensity.

Although scarlet sage cannot withstand freezing temperatures, optimum temperature for storage and transport of plugs ranges from 45 to 55°F (7 to 13°C) (Heins et al., 1994); however, Armitage (1994) cautions that reddening of foliage may occur below 50°F (10°C). Perennial salvia (Salvia ×superba Stapf.), an herbaceous perennial of garden origin, is a cold hardy plant able to withstand root medium temperatures to –14°F (–10°C); however, regrowth was limited when root medium temperatures were reduced to –10°F to 12°C) indicating a well-defined low-temperature threshold for this species (Iles and Agnew, 1993).

PROPAGATION

Scarlet sage is produced from seed (Armitage, 1994), while perennial species may be produced from either seed or cuttings. Autumn sage (S. greggi A. Gray.) does not remain true to type when grown from seed, thus named cultivars should be propagated from cuttings. Certain cultivars of mealycup sage come true from seed and therefore may be propagated by either method (Clebsch, 1997). Salvia seeds should not be stored for greater than one year since they lose not only viability but seedlings may have reduced vigor (Dole and Wilkins, 1999).

Germination of scarlet sage ‘Red H ot Sally’ seed was 0% at pH 4.5 and 5.0, 44% at 5.5, and 70% at 7.0 and 7.5 when germinated on filter paper (Shoemaker and Carlson, 1990). However, when seed were placed in perlite of varying pH, germination ranged from 60 to 83% with no significant differences among the treatments indicating that pH may not be an important factor when germinating salvia seeds in a growing media. Germination also failed after scarlet sage ‘Red H ot Sally’ seeds were stored at 77°F (25°C) and 75% relative humidity for 12 months (Carpenter et al., 1995). Optimal germination occurred when seed was stored at a relative humidity between 11 and 32% regardless of temperature (41, 59, or 77°F [5, 15, or 25°C]) but seed storage is recommended below 59°F (15°C) (Carpenter et al., 1995).

Temperature optima for germination are 75 to 77°F (24 to 25°C) for scarlet sage and mealycup sage, 70 to 79°F (21 to 26°C) for texas salvia, 70°F (21°C) for common sage, and 72°F (22°C) for perennial salvia (Nau, 1993). Texas salvia, scarlet sage, and mealycup sage require light for germination while common sage germinates best when covered and perennial salvia may be grown under either condition (Nau, 1993).

Postgermination night temperatures for the above species range from...
As fertilizer levels increased suggesting luxury consumption of these nutrients. Over watering, low calcium, high calcium-inhibiting magnesium, low phosphorus, or low magnesium can all lead to poor root and root hair development in scarlet sage (Koranski et al., 1996). For high-quality salvia plants, the optimum leaf tissue nutrient levels are (in percent) N, 3.0 to 4.5; P, 0.3 to 0.7; K, 3.5 to 5.0; Ca, 1.5 to 2.5; and Mg, 0.3 to 0.6 (values based on most recent fully developed leaf) (Nelson, 1994).

M ealy cup sage had greater shoot growth in a bank/sand mixture after 21 weeks than in a perlite/vermiculite mixture (Knowles et al., 1993). Shoot growth was maximal in the bank/sand mixture with either weekly fertigation at 100 ppm N (as ammonium nitrate, 34N–0P–0K) or preplant incorporation of 3 lb/yard³ (2 kg·m⁻³) N (as Osmocote, 39N–0P–0K, The Scotts Company, Columbus, Ohio). Dry weights did not significantly increase when these levels were exceeded and higher rates of N resulted in leggy plants with excessive plant succulence.

Although K concentration does not appear to be important for the production of scarlet sage, increased K concentrations may aid in the postproduction quality of plants. Moisture stress conditioning, lowering greenhouse temperatures, and increasing K fertilization rates were shown to reduce transpirational water loss while allowing plants to maintain photosynthesis at lower leaf water potentials (Eakes et al., 1991a, 1991b). These treatments may maintain plant appearance during the moisture stress often associated with transport and display of plants in a retail setting; however, fertilizing with K at 600 ppm also resulted in small plant size compared with 300 ppm.

### Height Control

Plant size can be controlled during production with the use of growth regulators, DIF, soil volume, and cultivar selection (van Iersel, 1997; Armitage, 1994; Incrocci et al., 1994; Higuchi et al., 1987). Scarlet sage cultivars are generally divided into three groups: dwarf (8 to 12 inch [20 to 30 cm], medium (12 to 16 inch [30 to 40 cm]), and tall (>16 inch [40cm]) (Armitage, 1994). Early flowering production is related to size with the dwarf cultivar tending to flower earlier (J. Nau, personal communication). Increasing container size increased plant size, lateral growth, and plant quality and decreased time to flowering (van Iersel, 1997). Thus transplanting plugs early may reduce the production duration of salvia.

Increasing greenhouse temperatures 11 to 14 °F (6 to 8 °C) above ambient (86 to 100 °F [30 to 38 °C]) retarded primary shoot growth, increased lateral shoot growth, percentage of flowering shoots, and mean length of inflorescence (Higuchi et al., 1987). Filtering light through copper sulfate (CuSO₄) has also been tested as a means of reducing growth. Incrocci et al. (1994) compared the height of scarlet sage grown under water-filled polycarbonate panels (control) and panels filled with a CuSO₄ solution. They reported no reduction in height for scarlet sage but reported a 2-week delay in flowering for plants grown under the CuSO₄ filters.

Chemical control of height has proven effective for scarlet sage and mealycup sage. Dole and Wilkins (1999) listed amcyimidol, chloroquine chloride, daminozide, and ethephon as effective on salvia and paclobutrazol and uniconazol as most effective. Armitage (1994) recommended two applications of 5000 ppm daminozole or two to four applications of 750 to 1000 ppm uniconazol for height control of scarlet sage.

Uniconazole was more effective than either paclobutrazol or daminozide in reducing the height growth of indigo spires salvia (S. ‘Indigo Spires’) (Rodrigues et al., 1993). U rooted cuttings were either soaked for 24 h, dipped for 3 s, sprayed, or sprayed and then resprayed 18 h later with various levels of growth regulators. The 24 h soaking and two sprays with 50 ppm uniconazole were most effective at reducing plant height. These treatments also reduced the number of flower spikes from 11 (control) to 5 but the authors suggested that the plants were still commercially viable. The treatment effects were short lived (less than 3 weeks) indicating that application of growth regulators during production would not affect garden performance or that repeated applications would be necessary if continued growth retardation were desired for plants in the landscape.

### Pests and Diseases

In the greenhouse, salvia is susceptible to many common disease and in-
sect problems, including aphids (Myzus persicae Sulzer and other species), whiteflies (Trialeurodes vaporariorum Westwood and Bemisia argentifolii Bellows & Perring), spider mites (Tetranychus urticae Koch.), common gray mold (Botrytis cinerea (P. Micheli ex Pers.), and damping off (Pythium Pringsh., Rhizoctonia D.C., and Fusarium Link) (Armitage, 1994). Two cultivars of scarlet sage, ‘Carabiniere Red’ and ‘Hot Line Red’, were slightly susceptible to root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne incognita [Kofoid & White] Chitwood, race 3) when inoculated with 200 eggs/ cell while mealybug sage ‘Rhea’ and ‘Victoria Blue’ were resistant; however, dry weight was not affected for any cultivar nor was dry weight of common sage affected when inoculated (Walker, 1995). A similar study by M. Corsley and F. Frederick (1994) indicated no galling on scarlet sage ‘Bonfire’ by root-knot nematodes (M. incognita race 3), but did find eggs on a few individual plants inoculated with another species of root-knot nematodes (M. javanica [Treub] Chitwood). Downy mildew (Peronospora lamii A. Braun.) and rust (Puccinia salviicola Dietel & Holw.) have each been reported on various salvia species but salvia is generally free of pest problems in the landscape (McMillan and Graves, 1994; Holcomb and Valverde, 1995).

**CUT FLOWERS**

Mexican bush sage may be grown in the greenhouse or the field for the specialty cut flower market. Plants should be spaced at least 15 inch (37.5 cm) apart but closer than 3 ft (90 cm) apart since the large plants will use surrounding plants for support (Armitage, 1993; 1987). Inflorescences should be harvested when white flower petals appear on the lower three to four individual flowers. Cut stems last about 7 d when flowers will shatter if allowed to wilt (Armitage, 1993). Mexican bush sage also makes good dried flowers.

**CONCLUSION**

Scarlet sage is by far the most widely cultivated species of salvia (Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, 1976) but has sometimes been maligned by horticulturists. It has been described as having limp, grass green foliage that is ordinary with flowerheads that are greenish in color (Clausen and Ekstrom, 1989). In contrast, native perennial species of salvia, such as mealybug sage, have been praised for their drought tolerance and nutrient efficiency making them well adapted for low maintenance landscapes in the south (Knowles et al., 1993). Native perennial species are also prized for their wildlife value; hummingbirds and bees seek the flowers while birds eat the seeds (Boring et al., 1995).

A interest in native plants increases, so too will the number of salvia species in cultivation and the need for production information, environmental requirements, and postharvest research on those species (Knowles et al., 1993). Even the most basic information, such as hardiness, has not been investigated for many of the native salvia species as is evidenced by the conflicting hardiness ratings given by gardening books. Since many salvia species are native to arid and resource poor environments, the need is apparent for further research within this genus. New introductions will require evaluation in different soil types, regions of the country, and in the cultivated landscape.

**LITERATURE CITED**


The drug salvia is readily available in stores and online. It can cause severe hallucinations and lack of body control. But it's still legal in Canada. Today, salvia is marketed as providing a "natural high" and sold in head shops and online in highly concentrated doses. When smoked it is 10, 20 or even 100 times more potent than the leaves themselves. According to Health Canada's most recent, 2011 Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey, 5.4 per cent of people aged 15 to 24 had used salvia. According to numerous studies, salvia users can experience time distortion and, at higher doses, terrifying hallucinations. There is a risk of injury because the drug can leave users unable to control their physical movements. You might be interested although scarlet sage cannot withstand freezing temperatures, optimum temperature for storage and transport of plugs ranges from 45 to 55 °F (7 to 13 °C) (Heins et al., 1994); however, Armitage (1994) cautions that reddening of foliage may occur below 50 °F (10 °C). Perennial salvia (Salvia ×superba Stapf.), an herbaceous perennial of garden origin, is a cold hardy plant able to withstand root medium temperatures to -14 °F (-10 °C); however, regrowth was limited when root medium temperatures were reduced to -10 °F (-12 °C) indicating a well-defined low-temperature threshold for Salvia officinalis is part of the Salvia genus in the Labiatae family, containing over 700 species of plants. It has been used over several millennia across a number of different cultures including Ayurvedic medicine, as well as early Greek and Chinese civilisations as a treatment for the amelioration. The proposed mechanisms of action for S. officinalis include acetylcholinesterase inhibition (ChEI), butyrylcholinesterase inhibition (BuChe), antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and oestrogenic effects (Perry et al., 1999; Kennedy and Scholey, 2006). To date two randomised controlled trials have be