



For the love of

# *Salvias*

by David Musker, The Jindivick Country Gardener.



*Salvia 'Meigans Magic'*



*Salvia discolour*



*Salvia cacaliifolia*



*Salvia Splendens 'Van Houttei'*



*Salvia greggii 'Bicolor'*



*Salvia guaranitica 'Black n Blue'*



*Salvia Canariensis*

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# Salvias

WITH AN AMAZING DIVERSITY OF GROWTH HABIT, COLOUR AND GROWING REQUIREMENTS, SALVIA IS ONE OF THE LARGEST OF ALL PLANT GENERA. THEY ARE NATIVE TO MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD BUT NOT TO AUSTRALASIA. DESPITE THAT, THEY GROW EXCEPTIONALLY WELL HERE.

This species is easy to look after, many are sun loving and they flower prolifically from summer to late autumn. They grow quickly and many have the added advantage of interesting and dramatic foliage ranging from pale green to silver white, sometimes covered in fine hairs that makes you want to pat or stroke them, and others with quite rough and textured leaves.

Given the enormity of the salvia group and the diversity within it, I am going to highlight just a few salvias that have proved useful and rewarding for me. There are many publications that deal in great detail with these amazing species. If you are interested in seeking out more information on particular plants, I would recommend that you contact the Victorian Salvia Study Group in Melbourne, they have publications and an impressive display garden of salvias and are very helpful. [www.salvias.org](http://www.salvias.org).

## *Salvia corrugata*

Originating from Ecuador, this hardy shrub grows to 1.5 metres high and wide in a rather uncontrolled manner. It has the most wonderfully textured deep green leaves that make this plant of interest all year round but, when it flowers from late spring to autumn, the vibrant deep blue flower heads are striking, and an excellent contrast to the leaves. It likes full sun to semi shade, is not demanding of water and is generally frost hardy. It does require pruning to keep it in shape if you like things controlled and, of course, after flowering in late winter it will need a good prune by up to half the plant size. It is easy to propagate by cuttings.

## Salvia 'Meigans Magic'

This salvia is a cultivar of Salvia Anthony Parker and *Salvia leucantha*, bred in South Australia by Robin Powell. It grows to 1.2m high and wide and has soft grey green leaves that complement the flower stems of deep navy blue and white. The flowers appear between late summer and autumn. This plant is at its best in full sun to semi shade in well-drained soil. It can be tip pruned in autumn to encourage a second flush of flowers. I have used this plant in borders and in mass plantings. It looks great when there are three or five of them together. Prune back by half in late winter. Propagate by cuttings. A reliable hardy plant that is worth including in any garden.

## Salvia 'Hotlips'

*Salvia microphylla* cultivar - origin unsure

This is a sweet little perennial with a mixture of red and white flowers on the one plant. It grows to 80cm high and wide and is happiest in full sun to part shade but needs some moisture to perform best so mulch this one well. It needs pruning to keep it compact and after flowering in winter cut back to half size. Propagate by cuttings and side shoots. 'Hot lips' is a dainty plant that livens up any garden but again I would plant this one in a group of three to get the impact. It has deep green small leaves and is easy to keep compact. Excellent for the front of a boarder or along a path edge.

*Salvia corrugata*



Salvia 'Hotlips'



*Salvia mexicana* 'Lolly' Cultivar



Salvia gregii 'Pumpkin'



#### *Salvia mexicana* 'Lolly' cultivar

This shrub grows to 1.2 meters high and wide and has a compact form that makes it very useful in garden design. Its leaves are grey green and are slightly hairy. The flowers appear between late summer and winter and are purple-blue, a great contrast to the leaves. It likes well-drained soil and moisture so mulch to keep roots moist and cool. Prune back by one third after flowering to keep that appealing compact shape. This plant looks best among more unruly growers that will accentuate its form. Leaves contrast well with plants with deep green leaves. Propagate by cuttings.

#### *Salvia discolour*

This plant originated from Peru. It grows to 80cm by 80cm but don't let its small stature put you off. It has silver grey stems and deep grey green leaves with silver grey undersides and, best of all, it has long flower stems covered in deep purple, almost black flowers. This plant is delicate but dramatic and is well used at the front of borders or as a contrast to other plants. I love this salvia and have used it many times in design jobs where it has performed very well. It needs some level of moisture so mulch to keep the soil cool and moist and it likes a well-drained position. It handles full sun and light frosts. Prune back by half to keep compact after flowering which lasts from summer to late autumn. Propagate by cuttings.

Salvia africana lutea



#### *Salvia gregii* 'Pumpkin'

This salvia originated in Texas to Mexico and 'Pumpkin' is a cultivar of *gregii*.

It is a small, delicate plant growing to 80 cm by 80cm. It flowers from early summer to late autumn and has a wonderful colour of rich cream to pumpkin. This cultivar likes full sun and handles heat well. It has small mid green leaves that contrast well with the flower colour. It requires pruning after flowering to keep it in shape but is well worth including in any garden because of its unusual flower colour and its gentle nature. It can be propagated by cuttings and looks great en masse.

#### *Salvia africana lutea*

This shrub comes from South Africa. It grows up to 1.2 metres by 1.2 metres and has excellent grey green foliage. It has burnt orange to brown flowers that compliment the foliage very well. It is hardy and stands up to wind well. It can make a great hedge or be used as a backdrop for other planting. It is easily clipped to shape and, with its foliage colour and flower, is a dramatic addition to any garden. I have it growing in full sun where it looks striking all year round. Propagate by cuttings.

Salvia aethiopis



#### *Salvia aethiopis*

This biennial is from Central Southern Europe, Mediterranean and North Africa.

It grows to 60cm by 60 cm. it's the leaves I love and the fact that it produces a 1m high white flower in spring to late summer. The leaves grow in a rosette form and are silver grey and hairy, almost like an animal fur. The flower head is a clear white and lasts for some time. This plant does not like wet feet so well drained soil is the thing. It looks great where it has the room to be appreciated, don't plant it too close to other plants, otherwise the leaves can get lost and they are such a great look its worth featuring them. Propagation is by division of side shoots and seed.

All nurseries carry a selection of Salvias. They will be particularly noticeable from late summer to late autumn, when they are flowering. The ones I have mentioned in this article are available and should be easy to find. When buying Salvias remember to check the labels and ask for advice. Because of the size and diversity of this genus, they have very different needs. If you select and plant appropriately you will enjoy many years of pleasure and probably become an avid Salvia collector. They certainly will add interest to your garden.

*With thanks to Jan Burrige of Jindivick for allowing us to photograph her lovely Salvia collection pictured with this story.*