

## **Salvias are dependable for gardens and containers**

There are some plants that just belong in every gardener's garden or containers. They are the tried and true, the old friends that can be depended on to perform without demanding special attention. Salvia is on that short list of indispensable plants.

A member of the mint family, they attract butterflies, bees and other pollinators, and hummingbirds. They grow quickly, thrive in summer heat, and tolerate short periods of drought.

We plant salvias as both annuals and perennials in our northern Illinois gardens. They are mainstays in the perennial border and must haves in sun-drenched containers. Whether in the ground or in containers, salvias prefer a site in full sun with very well-drained soil.

If deadheaded, varieties we grow as annuals bloom nonstop throughout the summer to the delight of butterflies and hummingbirds that feast on their nectar-rich flowers. Available in brilliant shades of pink, red, blue, purple and white, their densely-packed flower spikes rise above fragrant foliage. Feed with a slow-release fertilizer when planting or every few weeks with a liquid fertilizer.

My favorite salvia for containers is Mystic Spires. Tall 24-inch stems present beautiful dark blue flowers over refined foliage. If hummingbirds were voting, they would choose Salvia 'Black & Blue'. It offers large, cobalt blue flowers practically dripping in nectar. They grow large – up to 3 feet tall and wide – and feature near black stems and large, coarse leaves.

Salvia 'Summer Jewel Red' was chosen by All-America Selections as an award winner in 2011. It grows 18 inches tall and wide and its glowing red flowers light up gardens and containers. Hot Lips is another red variety that sets the landscape on fire. Salvia 'Victoria Blue' is an old-fashioned favorite, prized for its true blue flowers.

Perennial salvias are available in shades of lavender, blue, purple, violet, and white. Butterflies and hummingbirds love them; deer and rabbits do not. Plant them in compost-amended soil at the same depth they were planted in their pots and water deeply. Many types can be cut back after flowering to promote another round of blooms.

May Night was named Perennial Plant of the Year in 1997 by the Perennial Plant Association. Purplish-blue flowers top plants growing 18 inches tall and wide. East Friesland offers violet flowers and Eveline shows off soft purple and pink bi-colored blooms.

Caradonna is the drama queen of the family boasting dark purple flowers on dark purple stems. Marcus is the little brother, tagging along at just 10 inches tall. It's a real cutie at the front of the border.

Salvias are beautiful planted in large swaths in the landscape. Or partner purple-blooming salvias with yellow-flowering perennials like black-eyed Susan, Zagreb tickseed or Coronation Gold yarrow in perennial borders.

In containers, salvias get along with most other annuals. Calibrachoa, lantana, marigolds, petunias, flowering vinca and zinnias are all happy to share a residence with salvias. Add some chartreuse sweet potato vine to trail over the edge.

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