**Salvias in the Garden**

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Salvias are important plants for the summer and autumn landscape in South Texas. Most are drought-tolerant and all (as far as I know) are deer-proof. I say most are drought-tolerant because the Salvia splendens are not in the same league as most salvias concerning water use.

The most common salvias that we use in our landscape in addition to Salvia splendens are Salvia farinacea, Salvia leucantha, Salvia greggii and Salvia coccinea.

Salvia coccinea is unusual for the salvias we are most familiar with in that it has significant shade tolerance. The plant that has naturalized in many neighborhoods has a red flower. There is also a pink- and white-flowered version that we usually call tropical salvia. It is mostly used as an annual but I have a large patch in full sun in my landscape that has returned across three mild winters so far.

The red Salvia coccinea is included in wildflower mixes as a plant that blooms through the summer and in the autumn. It grows to 30 inches tall and like all salvias it is a favorite of hummingbirds as a nectar source.

Salvias are easy to breed and/or select for superior blooming and growth characteristics. The favorite parent plant is Salvia farinacea (mealy cup-sage). Progeny of Salvia farinacea include the 5-foot-tall spreading “Indigo Spires,” the 30-inch reasonably aggressive “Henry Duelberg” and the disciplined 18-inch “Victoria.” There are white Salvia farinacea in addition to the blue versions.

Salvia farinacea appears in most deer-proof landscape plans, almost all butterfly and hummingbird garden plans and xeriscape plans for full sun. The plant and its progeny freeze back every winter to reappear in early summer (May). The bloom period is from May through Thanksgiving. Salvia farinacea does spread by seed in addition to returning each year as a perennial.

Salvia greggii has woody stems and is considered by many gardeners as a shrub. Most years the plant is evergreen so it can grow up to 4 feet tall and become quite leggy. The recommended practice is to prune it back to the ground every few years.

Salvia greggii is available in red, white, pink, lavender or salmon blooms. The common names include autumn sage and cherry sage. It blooms most in fall and spring and less in mid-autumn. The flowers are small but they cover the stems for an attractive display. Hummingbirds make use of Salvia greggii as a nectar source.

Salvia leucantha is also called Mexican bush sage. It produces purple spikes with small adornments (actual blooms) on a stalk above a 3- to 4-foot weeping plant with silvery blue foliage. Salvia leucantha is relatively upright but does not have a somewhat spreading nature. The tough, pest-free plant is reliable late summer and fall bloomer that is a favorite of butterflies and hummingbirds.

Salvia splendens is called scarlet sage. It is available in many selections that are grown for the showy red flowers and lush foliage. Selections are available as short as 1 foot or as tall as 3 feet. Unlike most salvia, it is often grown in a row or as a border in the flower garden. In my experience it requires about as much water as zinnias even though it prefers morning sun and has trouble surviving our hot summers.

**Garden Tasks**

If Bermuda grass has invaded your flower gardens or shrub border, the grass specific contact herbicides Poast, Grass-be-Gone, Vantage, Over the Top or Fusilade will control it without hurting the landscape plants.

It is essential that fruit trees receive irrigation every two weeks during July and August if you want a full crop next spring. The fruit buds form now.

Replant zinnias if your planting declines from powdery mildew. The new planting will bloom until Thanksgiving.

The black layer on crape myrtle, pecan and other plant leaves is sooty mold. It results from a surface fungus growing on the honeydew excrement from aphids. Aphids can be controlled by any insecticide or even a stream of water if you can reach them. The sooty mold will eventually wear off.