

Easy care yard plants



These are just one of many different salvias growing in the Master Gardener Discovery Garden at Riverforks Park.

Question: I want to find some easy-care plants to add to my landscape, what would you recommend?



Janet Bitter
Master Gardener

Answer: One of my favorite plant families is the genus *Salvia*, or the sages.

There are many colors and varieties, they are fairly drought-resistant, they attract pollinators like hummingbirds and bees, and deer don't like them! (Okay, I'm waiting to hear about your deer who is a salvia gourmand).

They are mostly herbaceous perennials, although a couple of common varieties in our area are treated as annuals. Most of them bloom from late spring until frost.

These plants belong to the mint family (*Lamiaceae*) although they don't have the invasive growth habits of mint – with a couple minor exceptions which we don't grow here. Plants in the mint family can be easily identified by their square stems and leaves that are opposite on the stem. Foliage is often aromatic (which most deer don't like).

The genus *Salvia* has over 900 species and is native to every continent

except Australia and Antarctica. They come in a tremendous variety of colors (reds, pinks, whites, oranges, purples, blues), foliage, size (groundcover up to 6 feet tall), and growing habits.

You may be familiar with Scarlet Sage, *S. splendens*, the perennial-treated-as-annual bedding plant seen each spring. The other common "annual" sold in our area is Mealycup Sage, *S. farinacea*, with spikes in purple shades. And what would Thanksgiving stuffing be without our culinary sage, *S. officinalis*? This perennial belongs in your herb garden.

The two annuals mentioned above are, of course, replanted every year. You will find a huge variety of salvias, but some are more suited to our climate than others. It is important to check the growing zone if you are ordering plants, or purchase from local



PHOTO COURTESY OF BY JANET BITTER

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nurseries who stock plants which do well in our climate.

Because there are so many types, you can use them in a lot of different ways in your garden – accent plants, screens, shrub substitutes, and many do great in containers.

Salvias, in general, do not like to be in wet or heavy soil. You can plant them in amended soil and make sure their

crowns are slightly higher than the ground around them to help with drainage. Most require full sun, although some can take partial shade.

Once established, they are drought-tolerant and require little care. No insects or diseases are problematic. And if the deer will leave them alone, what more do you want?

Other than making sure you water them when they are getting

established, you should cut back the perennial varieties once a year. It is recommended to leave the stems intact over the winter and cut them back in the Spring after you see new growth coming from the base.

Come out and see the many different salvias growing in the Master Gardener Discovery Garden at Riverforks Park. You will be amazed at the variety available if you do

a little research!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.