



2019- The Year of *Salvia nemorosa*

Most gardeners have a favorite Salvias and it's no wonder! The *Salvia* genus is huge with over 700 unique species, both culinary and ornamental types, plus annual and perennial lifecycles. There's something for everyone! Sage is the common name for plants in this genus. They are members of the Mint family and share that families' characteristics of square stems; simple, oval or lance-shaped leaves with toothed margins and whorls of flowers produced on spikes. They are also cousins to *Nepeta* (catmint) and *Monarda* (beebalm).

This year's final National Garden Bureau Plant of the Year is one particular *Salvia* species – specifically *Salvia nemorosa*. However, you may not see this botanical name listed on plant tags this summer since plant taxonomists currently indicate *S.*

nemorosa is synonymous with *S. superba* and *S. x sylvestris*, the latter being the most commonly used species name.

However, according to Allan Armitage, retired University of Georgia professor of horticulture, author of *Herbaceous Perennials* and perennials guru, there are differences between these species. *S. x sylvestris* is sterile and cannot be raised from seed, while *S. nemorosa* is mostly seed propagated. So below, the cultivars listed are those having close *S. nemorosa* parentage.

Commonly called hybrid sage, this species is perennial and winter-hardy to Zone 4, which means it can be grown throughout Nebraska. Making it a great long-term addition to the garden. Hummingbirds, butterflies and bees love *Salvia*, but they are not on deer's list of favorite plants to eat, so it's a good addition to gardens where wildlife is a challenge.

Salvia Cultivars

Here are two beautiful cultivars to try in your garden. Both are very common, so look for them at your local garden center this spring.

'Cardonna' was selected Outstanding Perennial in 2000 by the International Hardy Plant Union and one of my favorites. It has a long blooming period with vibrant blue flowers, grows up to 24 inches tall and has a compact growth habit. The striking violet-blue flowers are very attractive when set against a light-colored background or when mixed with white, yellow or orange flowers. Plants have strong stems and stand up better in the garden than other cultivars.

'East Friesland' is similar to 'Cardonna', but only reaches 18 inches tall. Stems are strong and do not require support. Intense violet-blue flowers.



Growing Salvia

Fortunately, salvias are easy plants to grow. They are most vigorous and full of flowers when planted in full sun, but will tolerate 3-4 hours of shade if necessary. They are also tolerant and adaptable to many different soil types, but they prefer extra soil organic matter. Before planting, work some compost into the planting bed to make your plants really happy.

Plants are quite drought tolerant once established, but will need good moisture during the first year or two in a new location.

Apply a balanced fertilizer, such as 10-10-10 or 15-15-15, according to label directions in spring as new growth starts and again in early June.

Many gardeners don't realize Salvia responds very well to deadheading after the first flush of spring flowers have faded. Cut plant's back aggressively to about one-third of their original size. New shoots will soon emerge and plants will be blooming again in 4-6 weeks. Repeat this process throughout summer and you will be rewarded with three or more cycles of flowering.

For more information on this year's featured plants, visit the National Garden Bureau. www.ngb.org.

Your Suggestions are Welcome!

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone 402 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528; or by e-mail sarah.browning@unl.edu.

Image - Salvia 'Cardonna', from Amazon.com



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