SOME SAGE ADVICE ABOUT SALVIAS
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It’s hard to say when my love affair with Sage began. It could have been when I smelled the crushed leaf of a Pineapple Sage. It could have been when I read the old Chinese proverb "How can a man grow old who has Sage in his garden?" Or maybe it was when I saw the hummingbirds flock to my Sage plants.

Sage is a well-known herb. It adorns the pages of cooking magazines, in bottles of vinegar or gracing the turkey platter. What does all this talk about Sage have to do with Salvias? The truth is that all Sages are Salvias. Salvia is the Latin name, or genus, given to all these plants. Over the years the term Sage has been associated with cooking or medicinal use and the term Salvia has been given to the ornamental members of the genus.

The genus Salvia offers one of the largest and most versatile groups of perennials. The Roman scientist Pliny the Elder was the first to use the Latin name Salvia, meaning to heal or save. The common name Sage started in England and referred to Salvia officinali, a plant used long ago as a household remedy.

Salvias are adaptable to almost any garden condition. Rabbits and deer don’t bother with them and neither do most insects. They are a major source of nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies and goldfinches love the nutritious seeds.

Some of my favorites include:
Hot Lips, a recent variety released in 2002. It has bicolor flowers of white with red lips. This attractive plant requires full sun and can reach 30 inches tall.

Salvia coccina "Cherry Blossom" is a new addition to my garden this year. I started these, quite easily, from seed. The flowers are a very pretty light pink, and the catalog promises that they will flower for a long period.

Peruvian Andean Silver Salvia is a tender perennial. This is a beautiful plant with purple-black flowers and lime green calyces (the little cups that holds the flowers.) The leaves are silvery and the stems are cloaked in woolly, white hairs. This plant grows to about 18 inches tall.

Black and Blue Salvia or Blue anise sage is a tall plant that will reach 2 to 3 feet in height. The bi-colored blooms appear in both the spring and the fall. The calyx is unusual in that it’s black instead of the usual green and the deep blue blooms are a favorite of hummingbirds.

The list of wonderful sages to grow in the garden continues with:
Tricolor Sage has green leaves with white margins with pink or purple. This woody stemmed plant can be trimmed back in the spring. In early summer it sends up lavender-purple spikes. These last a long time in cut arrangements.

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Pineapple Sage is a fun plant to have in the garden. Not only do the leaves smell like fresh pineapple, the plant provides color in the late summer and fall garden. Pineapple sage will wilt and lose leaves during droughts. It is grown as an annual in this area and overwinters well indoors.

Few groups of plants add as much to a garden as salvias. They are as different in fragrance as they are in bloom, habit and color. I hope you will take this sage advice and consider adding some salvias to your gardens. The hummingbirds and butterflies will thank you by gracing your gardens.

Note: Detailed information on growing Salvia is featured on the MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center this month: at https://www.extension.umd.edu/hgic/flowers

Salvia farinacea “Victoria Blue”

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