

## **Salvias and Lantanas in the Garden**

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Salvias and lantanas are important plants for the summer and autumn landscapes in South Texas. Most are drought-tolerant and deer-proof. They are also important sources of nectar for butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators.

The most common Salvias that we use in our landscapes are *Salvia farinacea*, *Salvia leucantha*, *Salvia greggii*, *Salvia coccinea*, and *Salvia splendens*.

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 hybrids freeze back every winter to reappear in 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 evergreen so is considered by many gardeners to be a shrub rather than a perennial like the other Salvias.

It is available with 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 midsummer. It does not freeze back in the winter and may even bloom far into the season. The flowers are small, but they cover the stems for an attractive display. Hummingbirds make great use of *Salvia greggii* as a nectar source. *Salvia greggii* in some settings it can become leggy. The recommended practice is to prune it back to the ground every few years.

*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 plant with silvery blue foliage. *Salvia leucantha* is relatively upright but does have a somewhat spreading shape. The tough pest-free plant is a reliable late summer and fall bloomer that is a favorite of butterflies and hummingbirds.

*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 is called tropical salvia.

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.

If you are from the north, *Salvia splendens* may be the *Salvia* that you are most familiar with. It is widely used for its showy red, salmon, pink and purple blooms on 12-inch plants in the summer flower garden. We use it relatively less here in San Antonio for early summer blooms in morning sun and afternoon shade. This is one *Salvia* that deer may eat in some neighborhoods and it is prone to be broken under their feet unlike the other sturdier *Salvias*.

There are three main lantanas and many hybrids to consider. Most of the hybrid selections were developed in crosses between *L. camara* and *L. montevidensis*. Like the *Salvias*, *Lantanas* are drought tolerant, pollinator friendly and usually deer proof.

Trailing lantana (*L. montevidensis*) is a desirable plant that produces lavender or white blooms on a plant that grows 2 feet high and up to 6 feet around. It blooms best in the spring and in the fall and, like *Salvia greggii*, often blooms deep into a mild winter. Unlike most lantanas, it also has some shade tolerance.

*Lantana horrida* is the native Texas lantana that produces orange and yellow blooms on coarse plants that grow to at least 3 feet around and 3 feet tall.

*Lantana camara* is an exotic lantana that has naturalized throughout the southern US. It has large clusters of red, orange, and yellow blooms on plants that grow to 6 feet tall and 6 feet wide. In addition to being a common part of area landscapes, it is the main component of the many lantana hybrids on the market.

The most common hybrid lantana planted in area landscapes is “New Gold”. It is a trailing plant that grows 3 feet tall and 8 feet around. “New Gold” produces showy blooms in the hottest part of summer without any seeds to produce invasive plants. One common problem is its susceptibility to lace bug damage. Application of a preventative systemic insecticide such as acephate has some potential to prevent the bloom pause caused by the lace bugs. “New Gold” freezes back to the ground every winter.

Select from other lantana hybrids for the characteristics of their growth, the color of the flowers, and the fact that they do not produce seed for invasive reproduction.-.