

Sage

By Trudy Hodges

Sage, a member of the mint family, is a perennial aromatic evergreen shrub. It has a square stem, with oval or lance shaped grayish leaves. Flowers range in color from white, to blue, and purple.

Sage is a member of the family *Lamiaceae*. *Salvia officinalis* is known by a variety of common names including: culinary sage, common sage, garden sage, kitchen sage, and true sage. It has a slightly bitter, pungent, peppery flavor which is traditionally used in holiday stuffing, and to season roast turkey or chicken.

Seeds can be started indoors up to eight weeks before the last frost, or into the garden up to two weeks before the last frost date. Plants can also be started from root cuttings. Plants should be placed 24 to 30 inches apart in full sun and well-drained soil. Most species are drought tolerant.

Prune plants in the spring by removing woody stems, and flower stalks. Stop harvesting in early fall to harden off the plant for winter. Plants can be divided in the spring or fall. Replace plant when it becomes overly woody.

Harvest lightly the first year to allow the plant to become established. Subsequent years, the plant may be heavily harvested 2 to 3 times. To save harvested leaves, place in a paper sack and leave in a well-ventilated area until leaves crumble easily. Store in tightly lidded jars. Sage can also be frozen by placing leaves in a plastic bag or container. Leaves blended with oil and placed in ice cube trays make a quick and easy herbal storage solution. Stalk and leaves may be woven into wreaths with other herbs for a seasonal decoration.

Sages are an excellent addition to any perennial garden. There are many ornamental varieties in addition to the culinary species offering a variety of plant uses. Here are a few that should grow in our area and altitude:

- *Salvia argentea* (ar-JEN-tee-a), silver sage. Size: 2 to 4 feet tall, 1 to 2 feet wide.

Silver sage is grown for its luscious, crinkled, soft silver-gray foliage. The ragged white flowers are best removed before they open.

USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 5 to 9.

- *S. nemorosa* (nem-or-OH-sa), garden sage. Size: 1 ½ to 3 ½ feet tall and wide. This lovely sage is smothered in stiff spikes of violet- blue flowers for 3 to 4 weeks in early to midsummer. Triangular leaves are soft, hairy, bright green. 'Caradonna' is tall (2 ½ feet) with open spikes of blue-violet flowers all summer. 'Lubecca' has blue-violet flowers on tall, open spikes. 'Marcus' is a true dwarf to 8 inches with blue-violet flowers.

'Ostfriesland' ('East Friesland') has deep purple flowers on compact stems 1 to 1 ½ feet tall. Cultivars are sometimes listed under the similar hybrid *S. x sylvestris*. The following selections belong here.

'Blaukonigin' ('Blue Queen') has violet flowers and is 1 ½ to 2 feet tall.

'Mainacht' ('May Night') has purple flowers and red-violet calyxes.

'Rosenkonigin' ('Rose Queen') has rose-pink flowers.

'Schneehuegal' ('Snow Hill') has white flowers. 'Viola Klose' has dark blue flowers.

Zones 4 to 7.

- *S. officinalis* (o-fis-i-NAY-lis), culinary sage. Size: 1 ½ to 2 feet tall, 2 to 3 feet wide.

Ornamental and culinary, a semi woody shrub with woolly, oblong leaves and somewhat

insignificant blue-violet flowers. Many handsome leaf colors with compact form are available. 'Berggarten' has broad oval leaves and is quite showy with blue-violet flowers.

'Compacta' is a compact grower to 15 inches with smaller leaves.

'Icterina' has gold-and green variegated foliage. 'Purpurescens' has gray-violet leaves.

'Tricolor' has pink, green, and white leaves. Zones 3 to 9.

References used: National Gardening Association