



Salvia

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As the days begin to shorten and we start to get morning dew once more, our borders are at some of their most exuberant. Our range of Salvias are a key part of this rich tapestry. The name 'Salvia' comes from the Latin 'salvere', which means 'health; heal; to feel well' due to the healing properties most likely associated with the herb, *Salvia officinalis* (sage).

Salvias are part of the Lamiaceae (mint) family. They hail from almost all continents though most of the popular shrubby garden varieties come from South America. As a side point, the herb rosemary was recently reclassified and renamed as a Salvia. It is now *Salvia rosmarinus*, instead of how I learnt it, *Rosmarinus officinalis*. Within this article I will touch on some of our favourite Salvias at the Inner Temple chosen for their beauty within the mixed borders, rather than medicinal or culinary uses!

The best place to start is with the star performer in terms of length of flowering season, an accolade that must surely go to *Salvia* 'Amistad'. This has upright, deep, regal purple flower spikes and has the longest

season with flowers from early June through to November. 'Amistad' was originally spotted in an Argentinian garden and the name is Spanish for friendship. Here we leave it in the ground over winter (as we do all the Salvias mentioned in this article). Those who have a wet heavy soil or harsh winters may wish to lift and store the roots over winter, almost as one would with Dahlias, and replant out in spring. Otherwise take some cuttings as an insurance. Either left in the ground or planted out in full direct sun (or part shade for some of the day), 'Amistad' is very vigorous and will grow large and put on a plentiful show, flowering freely throughout the season.

One small problem with this variety is that Capsid Bug particularly enjoys its foliage (fortunately it does not yet seem to be particularly interested in our other Salvias). This bug causes small holes and distortion



mainly on leaves towards the tips and can affect flower buds too. We have reduced our use of chemicals in the Garden and as 'Amistad' is so free flowering spraying chemicals is not an option if we want to protect pollinators. We have found that the vigour of 'Amistad' means that when we have damage, we can let it build up then cut back the stems to a lower point. The plant pushes new growth quickly and with the life cycle of the Capsid we will get new growth that is clean of damage and lots of flowers as the season develops. In addition, Capsid seems to enjoy dense shrubs such as Yew to hide and then feed nearby; siting the plants further away from shrubs like these also helps somewhat.

I have already mentioned the ability to prune 'Amistad', and we do prune pieces out especially later in the season when the plants become very large. This is to allow more space and light to any companions such as Cosmos coming through. Do not be afraid to do this, as

it pushes new growth very quickly. In previous years we have found soft flushed pink Cosmos such as 'Seashells' or 'Daydream' are pleasing with the deep purple 'Amistad', as are more vibrant yellows depending on what feel you are aiming for.

Other Salvias with strong flower colour include *Salvia involucrata* 'Bethellii' and *Salvia guaranitica* 'Blue Enigma'. The latter has electric blue flowers and upright stems with the plants getting to a similar 1.5-2m tall. It is not as free flowering or vigorous as 'Amistad' though the leaves are a brighter green and it works as a mid-border plant well flowering from July through to November. I favour *Salvia involucrata* 'Bethellii' which combines deep rich pink stems and mid ribs on the fresh leaves, with bulbous squat fuchsia pink flowers. The colour of all these vibrant Salvias becomes richer and more complex the later the season becomes.

For those that do not favour deep, bright colours or want a range of tones as we do here, then there are some stunning softer hybrids of *Salvia leucantha*. These really come



Top: *Salvia* 'Amistad'
Above: *Salvia involucrata* 'Bethellii'

Salvia guaranitica 'Blue Enigma'



Garden continued

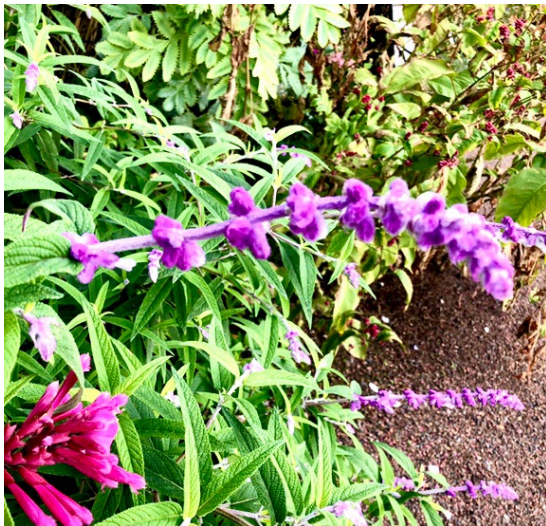
into their own from late summer onwards. I would recommend *Salvia* ‘Phyllis Fancy’ and *Salvia* ‘Waverly’. These have what appears as two-tone flowers and are slightly slower to get going, though we do start to see some flowers from July onwards. The upper calyx on ‘Phyllis Fancy’ is deep purple with white/mauve petals which are slightly hairy. The green leaves are pointed with almost a touch of silver. ‘Waverly’ is similar though with longer pointed leaves and longer flower spikes which are eight to ten inches long. Both enjoy full sun and dry conditions. We plant at the front of the border where they create large mounds with a spilling forward habit, which we enjoy very much. Last year they flowered into January and kept their shape softening the front of the High Border. We also have one of the parents of these

hybrids, the species *Salvia leucantha*, in the Border. It has thin pointed leaves and furry mid purple flowers – its fuzziness and colour remind me of the 1970s. I do not particularly love the flowers, though they sit well in a mixed border and are a good talking point.

We do not stake any of our *Salvias* and allow them to enjoy their natural habit instead. The upright forms seem to be supported by the plants that surround them, and those with a spilling habit would be spoiled by intervention.

I imagine many will have been away from the Inn for some time and so I hope for those who may now be returning, our *Salvias* – and the borders more generally – provide a much needed welcome back after their time away.

Salvia leucantha



Salvia ‘Waverly’



Salvia ‘Phyllis Fancy’