

Salvia coccinea Scarlet Salvia, Scarlet Sage¹

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Introduction

The native salvia is an herbaceous perennial that is native to the southeastern United States including the state of Florida (Fig. 1). It may attain a height of 3 to 4 feet with a vase-shaped or upright habit. It bears striking, rich red flowers (occasionally white or pink) in the late spring, summer, and fall seasons.



Figure 1. Scarlet salvia

General Information

Scientific name: *Salvia coccinea*

Pronunciation: SAL-vee-uh kock-SIN-nee-uh

Common name(s): scarlet salvia, scarlet sage

Family: *Labiatae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: Jun; Jul

Planting month for zone 8: May; Jun; Jul

Planting month for zone 9: Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: Feb; Mar; Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug; Sep; Oct; Nov; Dec

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: cut flowers; border; edging; mass planting; attracts butterflies; attracts hummingbirds

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: reticulate

Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: not applicable

Fall characteristic: not applicable



Figure 3. Flower of scarlet salvia

Flower

Flower color: red; white; pink

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering; flower season is longer in zones 9-11

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay; occasionally wet

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

This charming plant may be massed together as a tall ground cover. It also makes a nice red display in a perennial border in full sun. Plant it among other herbaceous perennials for a nice display of soft, red flowers borne terminally on erect stems.

Salvia will perform well in full sun, partial shade, or full shade; however, flowering is reduced in partial shade. It prefers a moist, well-drained soil and, unlike many flowering bedding plants, is very drought tolerant. Native salvia is at its best during the hottest summer months when other flowering plants may suffer from the heat. To maintain a neat-looking landscape, cut it back at the end of the year after it finishes flowering and foliage begins to die. Although this is not necessary for good growth or survival of the plant, it keeps the garden looking neater.

‘Lady in Red’ is a popular cultivar with deep red flowers. Rain often helps snap off the flower spikes, but new ones are usually not far behind.

One may propagate the native salvia by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.