

Cultural Details: **Salvia (annual)**

Traditional red Salvia (*Salvia splendens*) has been a familiar sight in parks and gardens for many decades. Plant breeders have added many more colours and shades over the last few years. In general, those varieties flowering faster in the pack tend to have a shorter flowering season outdoors. Check the catalogue for further descriptions.

Salvia coccinea is a similar species, which makes a good pot bedding and container item, with its slightly taller habit and flowers more spaced out on the spike.

Salvia Farinacea, in blue, pale blue and white, is an excellent and under-used bedding plant, especially in formal bedding displays, with a very long flowering season, and tidy habit.

Finally *Salvia sclarea*, or Clary, forms coloured bracts in blue, pink and white – it is generally grown as a direct-sown hardy annual and can be used as a fresh or dried cut flower. It is not covered further by this leaflet – see catalogue for more details.

Programming

Sow February and March, for sale in May and June.

Propagation and Growing on

Sow the seeds (300 per gram *splendens*, 680 *coccinea*, 750 *farinacea*) onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Ideally, sow into plug trays to minimise root disturbance. Cover seeds with a layer of vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 14 days at 20-23 °C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times, without overwatering, and grow on at 18-20°C.

When large enough to handle, after around 4 weeks, move the plants into a 6-pack, using a standard potting compost. Commence liquid feed programme as soon as plants are established in the pack; this is important to avoid yellowing of the foliage. Grow at 15-18°C until established, then the temperature can be lowered down to an eventual 10°C or so for sale.

Sell *splendens* ideally as the buds are just appearing, rather than in full flower. *Farinacea* and *Coccinea* plants can be moved into a larger, 1-litre pot, for a premium pot bedding product in flower. Use a well-balanced liquid feed programme as soon as plants are established in the pack/pot (i.e. roots visible at the base of the container).

Growth Regulators

Growth regulators can be used on *Salvia splendens* varieties (according to the manufacturers' guidelines), to ensure a compact habit for pack work.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by *Botrytis*. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases. Check for the presence of pests such as aphids and whitefly, spraying accordingly.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.