



The Source for Beautiful, Unusual, Exotic, and Native Plants



Spring 2019 Newsletter: Heavenly Hummingbird Horticulture



Amistad Salvia

nice full habit cloaked in light green healthy foliage and it shows no signs of disease

We are always on the lookout for plants that are not only excellent for the beauty, color, and reliability they bring to the garden but also for those that are great for providing ample nectar rewards for Hummingbirds. It really is hard for other plants to compete with [Salvias](#) for their ability to attract these aerial acrobats and we are always looking for those that provide spring, summer, and/or fall flowers reliably in our wet, hot, and humid summers as well as survive our typically cold wet Louisiana winters. For 2019 we have added some the newest and hottest award-winning Salvias to our selection.

[Windwalker® Royal Red Salvia](#) is a 2015 Plant Select® Award Winner. If you are not familiar with the [Plant Select® program](#), these are plants that have proven reliability in trials in and around the Rocky Mountain region of the US and we are hopeful that this *Salvia microphylla* (like Hotlips)x *S darcyi* hybrid will do well here in our climate. So far, these have been vigorous plants with a



Windwalker® Royal Red Salvia

issues even after our cool wet spring.

Windwalker® Royal Red Salvia produces a summer to fall display of extra-large intense blood red tubular flowers that emerge from dark burgundy colored calyxes. It is a vigorous plant growing to about 3-4'H x 3-4'W. To help ensure winter survival, select a full to mostly sunny location with a well-drained soil. Heat and drought resistant, once well-established, and sure to be a favorite among the hummers.



Calyxes of Black and Blue Anise Sage

What in the heck is a "calyx"? A flower's calyx is composed of all of its sepals and in many cases the sepals are all fused together, like in Salvias, creating a tubular calyx. If you think of a rose in bud with the green leafy looking things on the outside of the bud these are the sepals. The calyxes of Salvias enclose and protect the buds and basically seal off the ovary and seeds to protect them while they are developing and then will split open to release the seeds once they are mature. In Salvia breeding and selection, the colorful calyxes add contrast and interest because they actually last from before the buds emerge and often long after the tubular flowers have faded away. In plural form in can be spelled as calyxes or calyxes.



Heatwave™ Brilliance Salvia

Selected for their heat and drought resistance in Australian climates, the Heatwave™ series of Salvias were developed with the durability of *Salvia greggii*, the Autumn Sage, but with the denser more compact and longer flowering habit of *Salvia microphylla*, Little Leaf Sage. Although perfectly suited to the Southwestern climates of the US, these Salvias also do well under average garden conditions in well-drained soils.

[Heatwave™ Brilliance](#) produces

spikes of 1" long deep raspberry colored two-lipped tubular flowers that emerge from darkly colored calyxes. [Heatwave™ Blaze](#) produces spikes of deep red 1" long flowers that also have the contrastingly colored dark calyxes.

Expect these two heat and sun loving, drought resistant Salvias to grow to about 24-30"H x 24-30"W. Compact enough for containers and surefire summer to fall color for the garden and landscape.



Heatwave™ Blaze Salvia



Amante Salvia

Amistad Salvia, shown at the top left of this newsletter, has become one of our favorites in the garden and landscape, has proven to be reliably winter hardy, and has exceptional flower power as it is hands down one of the longest most reliably flowering Salvias that we grow. A new for 2019 introduction and sister seedling to Amistad is [Amante Salvia](#). "Amante" translates to "lover" in Spanish and we are definitely in love with this breakthrough color in the line of *Salvia guaranitica* (like Black and Blue or Black & Bloom) hybrids. Amante produces 1" long brilliant fuchsia colored tubular flowers that emerge from dark black calyxes. These vigorous plants begin flowering at a young age and we expect them to be just as reliable as Amistad. These guys get a little large and you should plan for them to grow to about 4'H and I have seen Amistad

at 6'W after 2 years in the LSU Purple and Gold Garden (Geaux Tigers!) as well as in our other landscapes. Flowering can begin in January and February if winters are mild and these plants continue flowering until after the first frost.

From the Cloud Forests of San Cristobal, Chiapas, Mexico, hails the aptly named [Chiapas Sage](#), *Salvia chiapensis*. It produces a mound of dense foliage topped by spikes of 1" bright fuchsia colored two-lipped tubular flowers that are a hummingbird's delight, just ask ours! This is a small and compact growing shade-loving Salvia suitable even for use as hanging basket specimens and growing to about 2-3'H x 2-3'W occasionally to 4' x 4'. Flowering throughout the warmer months of the year or nearly year-round under warm frost and freeze free conditions, Chiapas Sage makes for an excellent specimen plant for the porch, patio, or other outdoor area. This will draw the pollinators in for an up close and personal display sure to thrill adults and children alike. Chiapas Sage will likely withstand a full to mostly sunny location in areas with cooler summer climates otherwise it will prefer shade during the hottest portion of the day like light or filtered shade and



Chiapas Sage

Salvia chiapensis

with direct sunlight mainly during the cool morning or late afternoon hours. This little flower power filled Sage is considered to be reliably hardy in zones 9-10 with some sources suggesting that it is root hardy into zone 7 in a protected site and a breathable winter mulch.



Kisses and Wishes Salvia

The Wish series Salvias have proven to have exceptional flower power producing spikes of large 2" long two-lipped tubular flowers throughout the warmer months of the year and lasting well into fall. This series offers a variety of colors including: the original Wendy's Wish – fuchsia, Love and Wishes – purple, Ember's Wish – orange, and now the newly introduced [Kisses and Wishes](#) with rosy pink flowers. These are half hardy or tender perennials whose flowers attract hummingbirds as well as larger butterflies. The Wish series Salvias sport dark green foliage on plants that can reach 3-4'H x 2-3'W and make wonderful medium-sized (10-14") container specimens as well as providing continuous spring to fall color in the garden and landscape. They prefer a full sun to partly shaded site with average to moist (not soggy), well-drained moderately fertile soils. Where not cold hardy, they will still make rewarding annuals and can be overwintered indoors in a warm sunny window or greenhouse.



Lyrical™ Silvertone Salvia

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This year we have added some of the best and newest repeat flowering *Salvia nemerosa* types of Salvias or Sages. *Salvia nemerosa* (including its hybrids) is an award winning, typically long-lived, and popular clump-forming low and bushy Eurasian sage with quilted medium green foliage on well-branched plants producing dense spikes of colorful calyxes and hooded bee-pollinated flowers



Lyrical™ Rose Salvia

that range in color from deep purples, blues, pinks, and to white. The newer introductions include longer repeat flowering selections as well as the unique bicolor flowers of Lyrical™ Silvertone Salvia. *Salvia nemerosa* and its hybrids have been selected as the [2019 Perennial Plant of the Year](#) by the National Gardening Bureau.

[Lyrical™ Silvertone Salvia](#) produces dense spikes of deep purple flowers edged in silvery white. All atop a low dense well-branched clump-forming pest resistant perennial. The Lyrical™ series is set apart from its brethren by their full and dense branching habit and their repeat flowering ability that begins in spring and continues throughout summer and into fall. We have also added [Lyrical™ Rose Salvia](#) which is a pink flowering selection with darkly contrasting red-purple calyxes. Provide these drought resistant sages with good to excellent drainage and a full to mostly sunny position in the garden and landscape or use them as low maintenance water-wise container plants.

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At the start of the 2019 spring season we also offered [Sky Blue Marvel Salvia](#), another *Salvia nemerosa* type, with deep azure blue flowers, but have quickly sold out of it and we will likely not have it available again until 2020. Sky Blue Marvel boasts some of the largest flowers in the *S. nemerosa* group as well as an exceptionally long season of flowering.

Agastache – A Heat and Sun-Loving Summer-Long Hummingbird Buffet

One of the newest and most exciting Agastache on the market this year is [Kudos™ Red Hummingbird Mint](#)! Finally, a true solid red Agastache! The show begins in early to midspring and this neat little Agastache will continue flowering into fall all on a dense compact plant with fragrant blue-green foliage. Its small compact stature lends it to use as a low maintenance container specimen where you can bring the hummers in close or use it near the front of the garden or landscape in a full to mostly sunny site. The dense flower clusters just seem to keep coming and cover up the top of the plants. Our Ruby Throated Hummingbirds have aptly placed this Hummingbird Mint at the top of their list!



Kudos Ambrosia Agastache

Image courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries, www.terrannovanurseries.com, all rights reserved.

[Kudos™ Ambrosia Agastache](#) or Hummingbird Mint is a color changing hybrid that produces loose spikes of deep orange buds that open to pastel orange 1-1/2" long tubular flowers that mature to a soft rosy pink. Our local Hummingbird population has already decided that this is a dessert worth fighting for! Like its brethren in the Kudos™ series, Kudos™ Ambrosia Hummingbird Mint sports a compact habit reaching about 18"H x 12" wide with a reliably long season of flowering. This pastel colored Agastache is sure to add color and excitement to the Hummingbird garden!

Flowers do not have to be red for hummers to enjoy them, they only have to provide a nectar reward worthy of their efforts. Scientists have suggested that every square meter of ground is checked for nectar producing flowers in regions where hummingbirds are native. We have witnessed our hummingbirds faithfully guarding our blue and purple Agastache, as well as migrating Monarchs and other butterflies both, large and small, utilizing them, and the bees seem to work these flowers non-stop throughout the day.

When it comes to cold hardiness and reliability in the blue and purple flowered Agastache, it is going to be hard to beat Purple Haze. It is reported to be reliably hardy well-into zone 6 by the discoverers at North Creek Nurseries in Pennsylvania. [Purple Haze Agastache](#) produces medium dense spikes of medium blue-purple short tubular nectar-rich flowers that are held well above



Kudos Red Hummingbird Mint

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Purple Haze Agastache – Coming soon!

Image courtesy of North Creek Nurseries, all rights reserved.

the deep green foliage from late spring-summer until fall on this vigorous and reliable Agastache. Even though it appears to be more tolerant of wet winters, good to excellent drainage should still be a top priority when selecting a garden location.

Many of the [Agastache](#) hybrids that we enjoy in the garden today were bred from species native to the dryer regions of the US like the Midwest and Desert Southwest. In areas with high rainfall, the eastern and central US and parts of the west coast mainly, the key to successfully overwintering Agastache is to have very good to excellent drainage. You should also plant them a touch high and with the surface of the original root ball exposed allowing the surface roots to dry out some between rains or watering. Don't crowd your Agastache in the garden as they need a little room to breathe. Good air circulation will help them to dry out quickly after the rains and will help to keep the plants full, dense, and vigorous. The fragrant licorice to fruitily scented foliage of Agastache helps to make them deer and pest resistant. Well-established plants need minimal care in the garden although periodic removal of spent flower spikes will help to keep them looking fresh and flowering. Agastache are considered to be somewhat drought resistant once well-established.

The Hottest New Perennial or Hardy Hibiscus!

For the spring of 2019 we now have the [Summer Spice® Plum Flambe™](#) Perennial or Hardy Hibiscus with large full truly purple flowers on what has been a vigorous yet compact plant. It matures to about 3'x3'. The Summer Spice™ Perennial Hibiscus is a breakthrough and award-winning series of new perennial or hardy Hibiscus developed by the Texas A&M University AgriLife Research and the Texas Foundation Seed Service and are being marketed by J Berry Nursery. Images and the information provided are courtesy of [JBerry Nursery](#).



Summer Spice® Plum Flambe™ Hardy Hibiscus



Airbrush Effect Hardy Hibiscus

Image courtesy of Walter's Gardens, Inc., all rights reserved.

We have also added for 2019, the Walter's Gardens Hardy Hibiscus introduction Airbrush Effect. Large 8"+ wide pink flowers with overlapping petals 'airbrushed' with white extending to near the middle of the flowers and with a deep red eye are produced over an extended period beginning in late spring to summer (depending on your zone) and flowering into fall. [Airbrush Effect Perennial or Hardy Hibiscus](#) is an 'indeterminate' flowering selection meaning that it flowers over a longer period than older cultivars. This is a compact 3-4'H x 4-5'W

plant with rich green foliage.

The 'Hardy Hibiscus' or 'Perennial Hibiscus' were developed mainly from our native Mallow species like *Hibiscus moscheutos*, *H. coccineus*, *H. grandiflorus*, and others. They have been called "Dinner-Plate" Hibiscus for good reason as they produce some of the largest flowers found in gardens and landscapes with flowers of most cultivars ranging in size from 8-12" with a few cultivars,



Midnight Marvel Hardy Hibiscus

Image courtesy of Ball Horticulture, all rights reserved.



Starry Starry Night Hardy Hibiscus

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like Moy Grande, reaching 14” across. Many newer cultivars offer deep burgundy to nearly black foliage and contrasting or complimentary flower colors like with [Midnight Marvel](#) and [Starry Starry Night](#).

These cold hardy Hibiscus prefer a consistently moist soil but are more tolerant of average moisture once well-established in the garden or landscape. A full to mostly sunny site with a moderately fertile soil are optimum for plant vigor and flowering. Each year these perennials should keep getting better and better producing more and flowering stems and thus more flowers. Begin fertilizing in spring once growth begins and continue until about midsummer. The only other maintenance required is to cut back last years brown stems once you see new shoots developing in spring. Hardy Hibiscus can be slow to emerge in spring as they are waiting for the soil to warm sufficiently and the days to begin to lengthen in hopes of avoiding late frosts or freezes. A winter mulch will help to ensure their return in the northern limits of their cold hardiness range and some cultivars are reliably hardy to zone 5.

The Good Bugs and Other Garden Beneficials

A Garden Friendly Snake – Dekay’s Brown Snake



Dekay's Brown Snake

All puffed up to resemble a Rattlesnake

As the days of spring continue to warm and lengthen so does our time spent in the garden. It just so happens that this is the same time when snakes begin to move out of their winter dens to find a mate thus increasing our chances of encountering one in the garden. Our fear of snakes is innate and rightfully so but not all snakes are poisonous, and some are quite good to have around. With that said, **ALL** snakes deserve our respect and should be given a wide berth. In most encounters, which most snakes try to avoid unless you happen to be prey (if you are prey RUN!), they will happily exit your presence as soon as they find an opportunity if they are not being harassed or feel cornered by pets or humans.

Dekay’s Brown Snake is a small, usually 8-12” long and up to about 15-18” long, brown to reddish brown snake commonly with a lighter stripe down the back and black speckles. It is a common garden and nursery inhabitant of the

Eastern US, south along the Gulf of Mexico and into Central America as well as into Canada. This harmless and beneficial snake is reported to spend much of its life underground and it is also commonly found under rocks, plant containers, and other moist cool dark areas where its main prey occurs which are slugs, snails, earthworms, and small invertebrates. Like many snakes, spring is their mating season and so they are happily out and about.

Like a Garter Snake or Ribbon Snake, the Dekay’s Brown Snake, *Storeria dekayi*, basically has live birth, although technically speaking it is viviparous and so basically the ‘eggs’ remain in the snake until just before the baby snakes emerge giving the appearance of live birth. A mature female can bear anywhere from 3-30(-40) young which are about 3-4” long at birth.

Unfortunately, many people in our area grew up knowing this as a ‘Ground-Rattler’ and so anyone who saw one would immediately kill it. There is an Eastern Pygmy Rattlesnake in at least part of the Dekay’s Brown Snake’s geographic range which is also known as a Ground Rattlesnake and with which Dekay’s Brown Snake could easily be confused by a

casual observer. The small Dekay's Brown Snake can imitate this viper to scare off would be predators. When it feels threatened it can widen and swell out its body to appear more like the shape of the true Ground Rattlesnake. It can also coil up and strike or more likely threaten to strike to continue the ruse. Some snakes, if they feel threatened, will even flick and vibrate their tail tip against dry leaves to further imitate the sound of a Rattlesnake although I am not sure if the Dekay's Brown Snake utilizes this defense as well. The Dekay's Brown Snake can also play possum and will roll over and play dead like the Hognose Snake.

Even though the Dekay's Brown Snake is a good garden and nursery beneficial helping to control slugs and snails you should **NEVER EVER** handle a snake as it would be easy to confuse a young Copperhead or other poisonous snake with it creating a dangerous situation where you or someone you know could get bitten by one of these poisonous vipers. It is best to **ALWAYS** respect wild animals and give them a wide berth. You should leave them where they are unless they pose a danger to someone and need to be relocated by a professional. Our native vipers, like Rattlesnakes and Copperheads, are also beneficial in helping to keep rodent and other small mammal populations in check. It is, and understandably so, hard to convince some not to destroy them even though they **ALL** deserve our respect and are an important part of our ecosystem.

Thank you for taking the time to peruse our [Almost Eden's Spring 2019 Newsletter](#) and if you know of anyone who would be interested in reading it you can forward it to them by copying the following textual link:
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Dekay's Brown Snake

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