

## Plant a New Type of Salvia Now



Photo to be credited to Magnolia Gardens Nursery: The 'Anthony Parker' salvia is one of several types of perennial salvia that flowers well for us in summer and fall.

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**I**t's August--so hot and humid that even the most dedicated gardener finds it difficult to work outside for any length of time. Not only the gardeners but also the plants are feeling stressed by the extreme weather. So while we gardeners are taking more siestas in the air-conditioning and/or at the beach or mountains (or on a cruise!), many plants are suffering in silence, wilting and drooping from the heat as well as the too heavy summer rains, no longer able to bloom their hearts out.

The question comes to mind, "What plant might be smiling floriferously at this time of year that the compulsive gardener could plant under August conditions?" The plant's constitution would need to be strong enough not only to establish itself but also to flourish and bloom, to create a beauty attracting second looks by passers-by, including people, butterflies and hummingbirds.

The answer just may be the new *Salvia* 'Anthony Parker'. This new salvia is a natural cross between *Salvia leucantha* 'Midnight' (Mexican bush sage) and *Salvia elegans* (pineapple sage). In 1994, Frances Parker of Beaufort, South Carolina discovered the plant by chance in her yard and named it for her grandson. From its parent *S. leucantha*, 'Anthony Parker' is blessed with long clusters of "charcoal purple" blossoms with dark calyxes. Like other *Salvias*, continuous bloom is encouraged through deadheading. The shape and attractive venation of 'Anthony Parker's leaves are similar to *elegans* and the gray-green color resembles *leucantha*. The slight fuzziness of leaves and stems is an indicator of drought tolerance. The stems are typically square but have a white and purplish tinge different from the parents.

In full sun 'Anthony Parker' has a long bloom period, in our area-- spring through fall. It will grow to approximately four feet tall with an equal spread. It is reputed to be hardy to 15 degrees but the tops may be burned back at 20-25 degrees. 'Anthony Parker' lends itself to propagation, either by seed, root cutting in fall or early spring, or stem cutting in early summer. The plant is in commercial production now, so plants are available at some local garden centers.

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This August-hardy cultivar belongs like all *Salvias*, to the family *Lamiaceae* (lay-mee-AY-see-ee), also known as the mint family and encompassing approximately 150 genera and over 3000 species. Many of the genera are plants known for the aromatic or essential oils of their foliage--e.g. mint, thyme, lavender, monarda, and a number of the salvias. Other well-known plants and thus cousins of the *Salvias* include ajuga, coleus, lamium, and scutellaria. Many *Lamiaceae* plants share characteristics such as square stems, opposite leaves, flower petals fused into an upper and lower lip, inflorescences in which the terminal flower blooms first. All of the above qualities are shared by many species of the genus *Salvia*, including *Salvia* 'Anthony Parker'.

The genus *Salvia* (sometimes called by the common name sage) with over 900 species, includes many ornamental flowering perennials, annuals, and shrubs. The name derives from the Latin *salvare*--to heal--a reference to their medicinal and culinary qualities. In modern times we might also think that their beauty, ease of care, pest and disease resistance, and attractiveness to butterflies and hummingbirds qualify as healing properties. Most *Salvias* flower for a long period of time, thrive in hot dry conditions, and require little care once established. The flowers are showy; sport a variety of colors, and the foliage is often aromatic.

For optimum growth, *Salvias* like soil with plenty of organic matter and good drainage. When this is the case, *Salvias* are not too fussy about soil pH or added fertilizer. They do like to be mulched but not with the mulch touching the stem. Once planted, they prefer not to be unnecessarily moved. Many will happily take full sun, though some like some protection from Tallahassee summer's hottest sun. Remove faded bloom spikes to encourage even more plentiful blooms.

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