

6–36 in
Nectar



Salvia coccinea

Photo by Martha Stewart



Salvia lyrata

Photo by Jeff Vochai

Florida gardeners will generally find three native *Salvia* species available. Scarlet or Tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*) is the most commonly available and occurs throughout the state (with the exception of the Keys) in areas with moist, well-drained soils. Lyreleaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*) occurs throughout Florida south to Broward and Lee counties in moist soils at woodland edges or in open areas. Creeping or Southern river sage (*Salvia misella*) occurs in moist semi-shaded woodlands from Alachua County south through Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. All are nectar sources for butterflies.

Salvia has a long history of medicinal uses. Crush the foliage, and you'll detect a faint herbal fragrance.

Description

Scarlet sage is a short-lived perennial that persists in the landscape by self-seeding. It generally reaches 18 to 36 inches in height and is taller than it is wide. Blooming occurs throughout the year in South Florida, and summer through fall in Central and North Florida. The abundant blooms are 1-inch long and usually deep coral or fire-engine red, although pink and white forms occur as well. The plant's square stems are green to dark brown.

Lyreleaf sage is a perennial that, for much of the year, consists of relatively flat,

variegated leaves that display a range of green, dark violet and chocolate brown. Light violet-colored flowers appear on deep-green or burgundy-colored stems in late winter or early spring. Stems reach 12 to 24 inches or taller, depending on available moisture, nutrients and light.

Creeping sage is a low-growing evergreen groundcover 6 to 8 inches high. Blooming occurs off and on throughout the year, with tiny, abundant blue flowers. The blooms are not noticeable from a distance, but the light-green foliage is very attractive. Plants creep out from a main central stem.

Planting

Use Scarlet sage in the mid-portion of a mixed wildflower bed or as an accent by itself. Space plants 1 to 2 feet apart and resist the urge to plant in masses — they self-seed readily and will spread throughout the garden.

Plant Lyreleaf sage in small clusters, with individual plants about a foot apart. Some growers have successfully established it as a spreading groundcover after two or three years of cultivation in a landscape.

Creeping sage is a good choice for tight areas and under trees, where it can be planted in pockets between roots. It tolerates light foot traffic. Space plants 6 to 8 inches apart.

Seeds

Scarlet and Lyreleaf sage are easily grown from seed. To collect your own, allow flowers to dry on stems and gently shake them into a container to remove flowers and obtain seed.

Plants

Plants are available in 4-inch to 1-gallon containers.

Care

For continuous blooming, cut Scarlet sage plants back after flowers are spent for continuous blooming. Lyreleaf sage can be mowed in late spring or early summer, after it seeds. Creeping sage can be clipped once or twice in the summer. Lyreleaf and Creeping sage may need water if planted in full sun or during extended drought.

Site conditions

Scarlet sage does best in moist, well-drained sandy soils with full sun to scattered shade. It can tolerate some salt spray.

Lyreleaf sage prefers moist ground and partial shade, but will tolerate full sun.

Creeping sage does well in bright shade and prefers moist soils. It will tolerate full sun but may become stressed in hot and cold weather.

Hardiness zones

Salvia species are best suited for zones 8A–10B.



Border planting of Creeping sage

Photo by Bruce Turkey

Butterflies and bees

Salvias are excellent nectar sources for butterflies and bumblebees. Hummingbirds are attracted to them, too.

Many non-native sages are sold in garden centers and other large retail outlets, with minimal identification.

CAUTION