

“Favorite Flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners”

***Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue' by Yen Bao**

Common Name: anise-scented sage

Family: Lamiaceae

I saw this plant for the first time many years ago at a small local garden center, around mid-spring. As a beginner gardener, I was attracted to its bright green textured leaves which contrast nicely with the dark upright stems with flower spikes at the tips, and the pleasant aroma of the leaves when rubbed. The flower buds are almost black where connected to the stems, but the tubular petals starting to peek out are deep cobalt blue, very fitting to the name 'Black and Blue'. Now I know that most salvia (sage) leaves have a certain aroma when bruised, and the black part of the flowers is the calyx (sepal). In any case, the plant is a delight. It grows quickly with plenty of flower spikes blooming continuously all summer to frost. Deadheading spent flowers will encourage additional bloom and keep the plant neat, but it is not necessary. I happened to put the plant in a container on the patio where I can see from the dining room table. That is when I discovered that the flowers are magnet for hummingbirds! They will go from bloom to bloom, fly away, then circle back again and again for hours on end. I think they spend more time at the plant than they do on my feeder.



The plant is native to Brazil, Paraguay and northern Argentina, hardy in USDA zones 8-10, so it is hardy in Chesapeake if planted in full or part sun at a well-drained spot and mulched well for winter. It is deer resistant, and with medium watering, will perennialize beautifully to large clumps up to 4-5 feet tall and wide. However, it is not hardy in containers in Chesapeake, and will grow only to 2-3 feet tall as an annual. It is possible to overwinter it by bringing indoor near a bright window or taking cuttings in late summer. It is still worthwhile to simply get a new plant every spring to place at a location where you can watch the hummingbirds coming and going to the beautiful flowers and foliage. The plant also serves well as a thriller in a container combination with other plants of different size, shape and color. Butterflies are also attracted to this plant. There were no serious insect or disease problems.

As I research for writing this post, I learned that there is a new variety for this plant, introduced in 2016 by Ball-PanAmerican Seed, called *Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Bloom' which blooms earlier, have thicker leaves, darker stems and bigger flowers (see references). I might try this variety if I see it, but the old one is already good enough to me. After all, an article by the Rotary Botanical Garden in Wisconsin has called this variety 'an easy "slam dunk" for attracting hummingbirds' (see references).

Photo Credits:

(Close up of bloom) Missouri Botanical Gardens

(patio potted plant) Yen Bao

References:

Missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder

Rotarybotanicalgardens.org/hummingbirds-are-requesting-black-blue-salvia

almostedenplants.com/shopping/products/11180-black-and-bloom-salvia-anise-sage/

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