



Growing Sage - A Wise Choice for the Herb or Flower Garden

Overview: Culinary sage refers to a small group of the genus *Salvia*. These are evergreen perennial shrubs with woolly grayish leaves that add an earthy freshness to foods. Spikes of purple/blue flowers appear in mid-summer.

Latin Name: *Salvia officinalis* Common Name: Common Sage, Garden Sage Zone: 5 - 9
Mature Size: 1' - 2' H, 2' -3' W Sun Exposure: Generally full sun. Needs some shade in higher Zones.

Bloom Period/Days to Harvest: Blooms mid-summer. May bloom first year, depending on size and site. Allow the plant to grow unharvested for the first year. Then leaves can be harvested at anytime, although they are consider at their best before or just after blooming.

Design Tips: Sage quickly becomes a small woody shrub that can need replacing every 3-4 years. Frequent harvesting and pruning helps to reinvigorate sage plants. While a sage plant is in its prime, it makes an attractive addition to both herb gardens and ornamental borders. The purple, golden and tri-color varieties work especially well as edgers.

Varieties: *Common Salvia officinalis* is excellent for use as a seasoning and is undemanding in the garden. For variety and attractiveness, try one of the following:

S.o. cv. Tricolor doesn't get as large as *S. officinalis*, but the variegation of its green, white and pink/purple leaves make it as much an ornamental as a culinary herb.

S.o. cv. Purpurescens has deep purple young leaves that mature to a burgundy

S.o. cv. Aurea is a compact grower with soft yellow leaves and purple flowers.

Uses: Sage leaves are a popular poultry and meat seasoning. They can be used both fresh and dried. Sage also makes a nice tea. The leaves and branches are often featured in crafts, like wreaths.

Cultural Requirements & Maintenance: Sage plants can be started from seed, root cuttings or transplants. Sage seed needs to be sown while fresh. It does not store well and even fresh, is not terribly reliable and is slow to establish. Root cuttings can propagated by layering (Laying the side branches down so that they are in contact with the soil.) Fortunately, reasonably priced, small sage plants can be found in most garden centers in the spring.

Sage prefers a warm, sunny location, although it does not enjoy extreme heat. It is not particular about soil, except that it be well-drained. Pruning after flowering will keep plants attractive and prevent them from getting too woody and leggy. Fertilize in early spring. Sage is very happy growing in containers. If you want to try growing sage indoors, you will need to provide strong, direct light. Few pests bother sage. It is done in more by excess water, not enough light and lack of pruning.

Harvesting: Harvest lightly the first year, as the plant becomes established. Harvest individual leaves as needed. Leaves can also be dried and stored for future use.

