

Horticulture Hints

I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.
—John Burroughs

April 2022

Now that we're finally getting some rain, spring gardening can start in earnest. I can do things other than water. My focus has been on food crops this year, and I'm trying some unusual and exotic types of vegetables. They're supposed to be in the perennial category, but I'll let you know about that one in about a year. More specifics on those in coming months. The new raised beds are coming along, and tomatoes and beans are well on their way to producing crops. I also have a mystery crop - I know I planted something in that spot, but have absolutely no memory of what it might have been. Can't find an empty seed packet either. Looks like a squash of some kind,but I didn't plant squash.... I'm hoping it flowers soon so that I can know if I have to rip it out or not.

Been thinking a lot about salvias lately. When the red salvias (also pink and white) start poking out of the ground, I start thinking about them. Because they're everywhere. Ever since coming to Florida, I've been

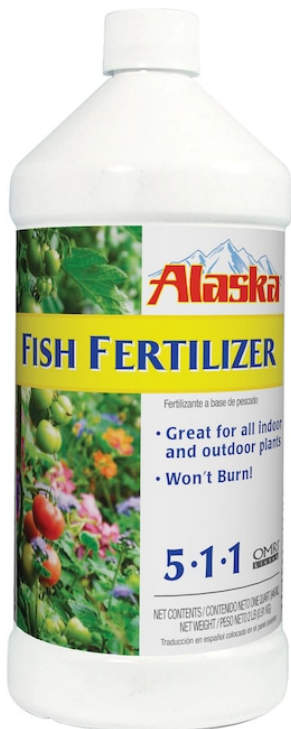


Salvia leucantha - Mexican sage

confused about the subject in general. It seems that they're perennial, but yet not. So been doing some research to try to figure out just what's what on the subject. What I found was that there are just under a thousand species of salvias (not to be confused with saliva) in the mint family. The genus is distributed throughout the Old World and the Americas (over 900 total species), with three distinct regions of diversity: Central America and South America (approximately 600 species); Central Asia and the Mediterranean (250 species); Eastern Asia (90 species) (Wikipedia). Some are perennial, others are annual, all seem to be very sturdy and happy to reseed themselves, or run underground to propagate. Pretty much all of them (that I read about) like a lot of sun. Most are appropriate for our zone 9A location, with only a few of them that don't quite tolerate our heat. Most notably for me in this category is Russian sage. I have rarely seen it in this area, but where I come from in Colorado, it's planted profusely in medians and parking lot islands, where clouds of lavender/pale purple hover above the white-ish stems from June to first frost. Pretty spectacular. But you almost need a clearly written plant tag in order to find specifics of your particular plant. By the way, rosemary (a member of this family) was formerly known as Rosmarinus officianalis, and is now apparently known as Salvia rosmarinus. Go figure. I'm still confused.

With the Annual Plant Sale over for the year, I'm sure lots of us have plenty of things to plant. Don't yet know exactly how we did, but indications from **The Day** looked like we did quite well. If you purchased trees or shrubs, 'as soon as possible' is the best time to put them in the ground. This gives their root system time to establish a little before

the real heat hits them. Don't forget to fertilize at planting time with a balanced fertilizer. Nitrogen (the first of the three numbers on the package) is good for leaves, stems and trunks. Phosphorus and potassium (the second and third numbers) are good for forming roots and encouraging flowers. I have gotten into the habit of adding a small handful of each Epsom salts (a discussion for another time) and a time-released fertilizer to the hole when planting.



Fish Emulsion Concentrate

Then they get a drink of diluted fish emulsion to settle them into their new home. Fish emulsion doesn't smell very good, (Emma loves it!) but is high in nitrogen, thus giving the plant a quick shot of low potency energy. And don't forget to mulch.

Speaking of mulch, I've been thinking a lot about that lately as well. Not only is mulch supposed to 1) keep weeds down (never out, it seems), but also to 2) keep moisture in, around the root zone where it's needed. But organic mulch also 3) breaks down into soil. So it would behoove a person to use a mulch that will make really nice soil. Wood chips (minus colorings and preservatives) work very well for the first two purposes, but if you're looking to build your soil fairly quickly, don't break down as quickly as some other things. Even in our semi-tropical climate, it can take several years to break down completely. I've been using leaves from our neighborhood's beloved oak trees for several years now, and find that they break down fairly quickly. Like in a year. Or less. The neighbors think I'm a little weird, going around begging for their leaves, but there appears to be an unending supply of them. Which is what I need. And in the spring when the oaks are getting their new leaves, at the same time shedding their old leaves, it seems an ideal time to replenish your (my) mulch! So in a nutshell (you can use them, as well), if you don't want to replenish your mulch as often, wood chips are great. If you prefer to build your soil quickly, use leaves.

Hope everyone got through April fool's day in good shape - happy gardening!