

# New Salvias from Suncrest Nurseries, Inc.



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With all their color, variety and adaptability, salvias have been one of our favorite pursuits for many years. At one time or another, we have tried salvias from nearly every continent, and the hundred-odd species and cultivars we continue to offer cover the ground from California to South America, South Africa and the Mediterranean to Japan. From early on, some really dazzling chance seedlings, like *S.* 'Dark Dancer', began to appear in the nursery, suggesting bright prospects for a more systematic hybridizing effort. Making it happen between other pressing nursery projects was quite another matter. Work finally began in 2004 with the patient field efforts of Patrick Worley, and it has continued nearly to the present. Our willing donors have been a group of species and natural hybrids from the American Southwest and northern Mexico, known collectively as the "microphylla complex": *S. microphylla* itself, *S. greggii*, *S. x jamensis* (a natural hybrid complex from northern Mexico), *S. muelleri* and others. *S. microphylla* has contributed its long life, hardiness, ease of culture, attractive large leaves (how it got the species name "microphylla" is a mystery), and often very large flowers. The other species and cultivars have added interesting flower shapes and colors ranging from violet to white, scarlet and even an occasional yellow.

The first year's seedlings far exceeded our expectations, yielding some entirely new (at least, to our eyes) flower colors and color combinations, and they led to our first patented plant, *Salvia* 'Dancing Dolls', PP #19820, described below. They also suggested several distinct paths for further effort. The most obvious, as we had hoped from the outset, was to combine *S. microphylla*'s attractive plant habit, lush foliage and large flowers with a much broader range of flower colors. Some true oranges appeared even in the first generation and begged to be enhanced. The few yellows we raised were already brighter than those of their *S. x jamensis* parents, and even clearer shades seemed possible. And some unexpected bicolors—most though admittedly not all in pleasing combinations—suggested that much more could be accomplished along this line. The next three years were spent "selfing" some of the best individuals and outcrossing them in ways that, we hoped, might amplify their best features. We formally introduced a few of our favorites in late 2008, and several more during 2009. Both the flower shape (we have always likened them to little ballerinas) and the way they dance about on the summer breeze suggested a name for the series at large, Western Dancers™. Now we'd like you to meet the entire group, including selections that are entirely new for 2010.

**'Bright Eyes' PPAF.** It seems fitting that the list should begin with the latest individual to join the troupe. This is a third-generation hybrid, though still showing the strong influence of an *S. microphylla* parent. The plant is robust and fairly upright in branching habit, responding well to any degree of pruning. It flowers primarily from midsummer to late fall, bearing long clusters of very large, deep red flowers, each with a distinctive white central "eye".

**'Dancing Dolls' PP#19820.** This *S. microphylla* cross was our instant favorite of the 2004 lot, displaying several unexpected features. The plant is sturdy and fairly upright, reaching three feet or more after a few years in the garden. The leaves resemble those of the *microphylla* parent, being up to 1" long, broadly oval and bright green in color, and they remain attractive even in winter. It flowers from spring to late fall, bearing up to 12 very large, bright flowers on each stem. Each flower has a rosy base and center and a broad cream "skirt". The contrast is further enhanced by the very dark stems and calyces.

**'Dancing Embers' PPAF** is typical of *S. greggii* hybrids in its bushy growth and rather narrow ½" leaves. However, it is anything but typical in flower, with masses of deep, glowing red blossoms set off by darker flower stems and calyces.

**'Dancing Lights' PPAF.** Some really interesting (and unexpected) bicolor patterns began to emerge in the second hybrid generation. This was one of the most intriguing. It has the spreading plant habit and large,

bright leaves one would expect from its *S. microphylla* parentage. However, apart from their large size, the flowers are completely unique. Each is shaded purplish pink on the tube and the basal half of the lower lip. The upper lip and outer half of the lower lip are vivid, glowing red.

**'Fire Dancer' PPAF.** This is a bushy *greggii* (or x *jamensis*) type of moderate growth, ultimately 2-3' high. It has typical small *greggii*-like leaves but is well distinguished by its masses of vivid blossoms in summer and fall. The flowers are large for a *greggii* and colored a vivid orange-red throughout.

**'Flamenco Rose' PPAF.** Along with 'Dancing Dolls', this was one of the really surprising crosses of 2004. It is robust and nearly erect in growth, with broad, bright green 3/4" leaves similar to those of its *S. microphylla* parent. It is extremely floriferous and displays its stunning flowers from mid-spring to fall. The flowers are large even for an *S. microphylla* type, with broad lower "skirts", predominantly colored a bright, clear pink, with white markings at their centers and on the upper lip.

**'Golden Girl' PPAF.** This is a third-generation hybrid, amplifying some of the best features of our *S. greggii*/*S. x jamensis* group. The plant is shorter and slower-growing than a typical *S. greggii*, and extremely compact. Leaves are small (1/2" or less) and quite dark. In summer and fall the plant is nearly hidden by masses of the brightest golden yellow blossoms we have seen in a salvia of this group to date.

**'Neon Dancer' PPAF.** A bushy plant of typical *S. greggii* habit, with bright green 1/2" leaves. It flowers heavily over a very long season, beginning in mid-spring, with brilliant purplish rose flowers of typical *greggii* size and form.

**'Orchid Glow' PPAF.** Our forms of *Salvia microphylla* have been remarkably generous parents, lending attractive foliage, long flowering season and large flowers to their offspring. More surprising has been the range of new colors that have appeared in their crosses. This one is a full, somewhat spreading plant with attractive broad-oval leaves up to 1" long. It flowers mostly in summer and fall, bearing very large flowers of a color difficult to describe—call it bright orchid or "vivid purplish magenta"—we're still struggling for an apt description.

**'Shell Dancer' PPAF** was one of our first-generation hybrids, sharing the same parentage as 'Dancing Dolls', above. It is a strong, vigorous plant, a little open in growth but responding well to pruning, growing nearly erect to at least three feet. It has the larger, prettier leaves typical of *S. microphylla*. The plant is seldom completely out of flower but gives its best show in summer and fall. The individual flowers are large, with fat basal tubes, these and the base of the lower lip colored deep rose. The outer portion of the lower lip starts with "hot salmon" shading, then lightens nearly to cream as it ages. Another notable feature of the flowers is their waxy texture and sheen.

**'Tangerine Ballet' PPAF.** Several good oranges have appeared in each generation of our salvia hybrids, making a final choice difficult. 'Tangerine Ballet' is one of the brightest and truest (some others are nearly red, still others approach salmon in their shading), and the plant itself is exceptional for a *greggii* type. It is fairly upright and neat in its branching habit, and the leaves are quite bright and shiny. It is a massive bloomer, beginning in late spring and continuing in waves through fall. Each large flower is colored a bright tangerine-orange overall, with contrasting yellow "eye".