

Black Sage by Leslie Bevans

If you have taken walks along any of the nature trails at Dorland, you've probably brushed elbows with black sage. The plant has dark green leaves and when it flowers in late spring, early summer, the blooms are light purple, some would say, blue, maybe periwinkle.

Sage is known for its pleasant fragrance but not everyone is attracted to the smell of sage. A long list of beetles, flies, snails, and moths have a natural aversion to the plant. Mosquitos are also repulsed by it. This makes it a good choice to add to your garden as it is a very pretty repellent.

Black sage is a drought resistant perennial. It grows quickly for the first few months and can get up to 6' tall. Because one plant can spread to 10' wide, it is an excellent ground cover and is very helpful for controlling erosion. It isn't unusual for a black sage plant to live for 15 years or more. So that means, if you, like me, have walked on the nature trails at Dorland in the last 15 years, it is a good chance that we have brushed elbows with the same plants! (Our elbows probably smell identical. Go ahead, try to smell your elbow. See? Same as mine)!



White sage also grows at Dorland along the trails but isn't as prolific as its cousin, black sage. It's fairly easy to tell the two plants apart. The leaves of the black sage differ from white sage in that white sage leaves are lighter green, and have broader, smoother leaves than that of black sage.

Black sage flowers are pollinated by the usual crew: butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. After pollination, the flower stem grows a tiny fruit, enjoyed for its sweetness by birds, people, and other animals. Because black sage is a prolific evergreen, many creatures depend on its seeds and leaves, and stockpile dried vegetation to eat in the lean months of winter.



If you can assure rich, well-drained soil, sage will thrive in your garden. Since the plant

can grow from cuttings, seeds, or divisions, you don't necessarily have to purchase from a nursery. Black sage grows fast, it smells good, birds and bees love it... Let's grow some!

Salvia mellifera (black sage) is medicinally, spiritually, and fragrantly popular.

Because of its anti-inflammatory properties, black sage is known to relieve pain and to reduce coughs and sore throats, so people make tea tonics from leaves and stems, or add seeds or leaves in cooking. When reasonable amounts are ingested, black sage is nontoxic. (There is a natural compound called thujone present in sage that can, in large doses, cause neurological problems like hallucina-

tions and nausea. But too much thujone means that you've ingested a LOT of sage. So please take this into consideration before you decide to live on sage leaf salads). Otherwise, enjoy a sprinkling of tender leaves on your pizza, a nice cup of tea, or a few blossoms of the black sage plant for a minty-sweet, peppery-over-toned, treat.



Black sage is also used by people in sacred rituals to heal, and to purify, places, people, and things. For instance, spaces can be cleansed or smudged with sage 'smudge sticks' or 'wands' in order to release and remove negativity. (Smudge sticks and wands are small, tightly tied bundles of sage stems and leaves). When ignited, allowed to burn for a bit, and then snuffed out, the resulting smoke lingers, like incense, and helps with the purifying or smudging ritual – and/or - simply leaves a room smelling fresh.

Obviously, the fragrance of sage smoke differs from the scent of the freshly picked leaves. Black sage is one of the most aromatic sages, (not the most strongly scented, that trophy goes to 'Musk Sage,' but black sage is right up there). So, what does black sage smell like? Well, if you blend 75% crushed peppermint leaves with 25% Italian seasonings (not including garlic or onions), you might come close to smelling the scent of black sage. Or, to experience black sage for yourself, you could just come to Dorland Mountain Arts and take a walk along one of the nature trails...

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