

Sage – The Saving Herb

By: Lori Glenn, American Botanical Council

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*), an evergreen perennial shrub with deep blue or violet flowers, was known in antiquity as the herbal savior of humankind. In fact, *Salvia* is derived from the Latin word *salvare* which means "to save." Part of the mint family, sage is native to the Mediterranean region, but is now grown all over the world. One of its first uses was to preserve meat, but it was used as an astringent and antiseptic as well.

The herb has also been used to reduce excessive perspiration and hot flashes (See HC 081151-431). It is a drying herb and has been used to reduce saliva flow and dry up breast milk. Native Americans used sage as a salve to heal skin sores. The leaves were massaged over teeth and gums to promote dental hygiene. Other conditions for which sage has been applied include dysentery, seasickness, colds and sore throats (as a gargle), dyspepsia, depression, and as a sleep aid. It is thought to foster circulation to the heart. Sage is also considered a good remedy for stomach ailments, promoting better digestion. It has been used as a spring tonic.

For the body, sage has been used as a deodorizer, to color gray hair, and as a hair rinse to restore hair to its natural color. Sage has also been used in lotions to heal sores and other skin eruptions.

Sage, as its name implies, has been thought to promote wisdom, and the ancient Romans referred to it as the "sacred herb." It has been associated with longevity and enhancing the memory. It has been used for mental exhaustion and as an aid in concentration.

Salvia officinalis is just one of over 700 species of sage. Others, such as clary sage (*S. sclarea*), have similar properties and are used in similar ways to common sage, but each also has its own characteristics. Clary sage, used extensively in aromatherapy, is known for its nervine abilities. White sage (*S. apiana*), found in northwestern Mexico and the southwestern portion of the United States, is used for incense and smudging. There are also a number of ornamental sages that will bring butterflies and hummingbirds to the garden.