

Salvia splendens

Salvia splendens, the scarlet sage,[1] is a tender herbaceous perennial plant native to Brazil, growing at 2,000 to 3,000 m (6,600 to 9,800 ft) elevation where it is warm year-round and with high humidity. The wild form, rarely seen in cultivation, reaches 1.3 m (4.3 ft) tall. Smaller cultivars are very popular as bedding plants, seen in shopping malls and public gardens all over the world.[2][3]

Salvia splendens was first described and named in 1822. At that time it was given the common name "Lee's scarlet sage". Before the plant was selected to become dwarf in size, an early Dutch selection named 'Van Houttei' was chosen and is still popular in the horticulture trade.[2]

The native type is rarely used or described, though it grew from 1.5 to 8 m (4.9 to 26.2 ft) in height.[citation needed] Its leaves are in even, elliptical arrangements, 7 × 5 cm, with dentate margin and they have long petioles. It may be branched, where its upper branches are finely hairy and in the lower parts though hairless. Flowers in erect spikes that sprout from the centre of the plant in groups of 2 to 6 together in each leaf node; scarlet, tubular or bell-shaped, 35 mm long, with two lobes towards the apex; the upper lobe is 13 mm long. It flowers a good part of summer and autumn.

It is widely grown as an ornamental plant, with a large number of cultivars selected by different colours from white to dark purple. It is a subtropical species that does not survive freezing temperatures, but can grow in cold climates as an annual plant. The most common selections are the dwarf sizes that go by names such as 'Sizzler' and 'Salsa', and planted en masse in gardens and malls. 'Van Houttei' reaches 1 to 1.3 m (3.3 to 4.3 ft) in height. The various types typically have red flowers.[2]

Named cultivars include:

The cultivars 'Vanguard'[4] and 'Van-Houttei'[5] have gained the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.[6]

