

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

APRIL 2016

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Photos by Will Stuart



Salvia coccinea Scarlet Sage

Reality Show in the Backyard

What could be more entertaining in the summer than a large patch of *Salvia coccinea* attracting hummingbirds, bees and all manner of pollinators for your viewing pleasure?

As an annual, Scarlet Sage blooms bountifully for you (and your pollinator friends) until fall frosts.

Notice the *Salvia* blossom, the expanded lower lip serves as a landing pad for bees. When the larger bees land on the outstretched petal, the stamens are pulled out and down, allowing

the anthers to release their pollen onto the bee's back. Then the pollen is available to the next flower the bee visits.

How to keep your *Salvia coccinea* happy

Scarlet Sage is a coastal species, and to have a

successful patch of *Salvia* in your garden be sure the soil is well drained and plants are located in full sun. The Mellichamp Native Terrace at the UNCC Botanical Garden places their *Salvia* bed

on a slope to promote drainage. As an annual the plants will die with frost, but *Salvia coccinea* does reseed

easily if the seeds are allowed to fall on exposed soil. Seedlings will emerge the next spring as the weather warms. Feel free to deadhead or cut back your *Salvia* to encourage branching and keep the plants looking attractive to encourage bloom.

So many *Salvia*...

If you're trying to be true to natives from the Carolinas or the Southeast US, the *Salvia* question can get quite confusing. *Salvia coccinea* is native to coastal areas of South Carolina, Florida and Texas. Other *Salvias* native to North Carolina include:

- *Salvia azurea* Blue Sage—taller, 2-6 feet tall, light blue flowers
- *Salvia lyrata* Lyreleaf Sage—purple flowers, evergreen basal rosette makes this an option in a no-grass lawn mix

Many other varieties you find in nurseries often come from Texas, western US and Mexico.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society and Audubon North Carolina.

Fast food service?

Hummingbird adapted flowers have evolved to convince their pollinators to visit frequently in order to spread valuable pollen. On each visit the hummingbird gets a small drink of nectar. But the plant continues to produce more small drinks in each flower, prompting multiple visits from the same bird, and cross pollination among the *Salvia* population.

