

Salvia sclarea

[Synonyms : *Salvia bracteata*, *Salvia haematodes*, *Salvia horminoides*, *Salvia sclarea* var. *turkestaniana*, *Salvia simsiana*]

CLARY SAGE is a biennial or perennial (often grown as an annual). Native to southern Europe it has small pale mauve-blue and white flowers.

It is also known as Biennial clary, Blue beard, Bright eyes, Christ's eye, Clarry, Clary, Clary wort, Clear eye, Common clary, *Erba moscatella* (Italian), Europe sage, Eyebright, Eyeseed, Gallitricum, Garden clary, Horminum, Muscatel sage, *Muskatellersalbei* (German), *Muskatellisalvia* (Finnish), *Muskatellsalvia* (Swedish), *Salbei* (German), *Šalvěj muškátová* (Czech), *Šalvia muškátová* (Slovak), *Salvia silvestre* (Spanish), See bright, *Sklareo* (Esperanto), Spotted hemlock, *Toute-bonne* (French), Wild clary, Wild hemlock, and Wild sage.

A bright green essential oil known as Muscatel or Clary oil is extracted.

Warning – large doses (or in combination with alcohol) can produce headaches.

Clary sage is a protected plant in the wild in Ireland.

Sclarea is derived from Latin *clarus* (clear, distinct) with reference to the past use of the leaves and seeds in remedies for eye ailments, and is an Italian name.

If the seeds are combined with water they make a sticky substance which was and still can be used to clear the eye of grit. Hence the common name Clary also derived from the Latin word *clarus* meaning 'clear'.

Clary sage was introduced to Britain in 1562 and acclimatized to the cooler climate quickly and became popular. Clary wine was considered to be an aphrodisiac, clary leaves mixed with elderflowers were used as wine flavouring, and at one time the leaves were also used as a substitute for hops (*Humulus lupulus*). While the resulting beer was said to create exhilaration it apparently caused blinding headaches too. Today the essential oil is used by the drinks industry to flavour vermouth and other wines and liqueurs.

Sachets of the dried leaves used to be placed amongst clothing and the dried leaves provided an ingredient for pot pourri. Now the toiletry, cosmetics and perfumery industries include clary sage among their ingredients, the former in soap and the latter especially as a fixative in perfumes.

Medicinally, in Europe a decoction of the seeds used to be recommended by herbalists to help remove any dirt or foreign matter which got into the eye. The dried root and seeds were also used to treat female ailments and digestive and kidney disorders, and a snuff made from the roots (still obtainable today) was said to ease headaches. In Jamaica (where the plant could also be found) not only was it used externally for eye inflammations and for ulcers but it was also combined with coconut oil (*Cocos nucifera*) to heal scorpion stings. Today the plant can still be employed, particularly for treating kidney diseases and digestive disorders.