

**BIODIVERSITY AND MULTIPURPOSE USES OF SPECIES IN GENUS *SALVIA***

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In the genus *Salvia* (Lamiaceae subfam. Nepetoideae) more than 900 species have been classified (Walker *et al.*, 2004); they are spread nearly all around the world and come from areas with temperate, tropical or Mediterranean climates. The use of sages is evidenced since ancient times by many cultures and peoples: in the Mediterranean Basin *S. officinalis* has been used by ancient Egyptians for medicinal purposes whereas its culinary use is more recent and represents a typical ingredient of Mediterranean cuisine; *S. miltiorrhiza* has been used for centuries in China against cardiovascular problems; the seeds of *S. columbariae* and *S. hispanica* were a main nutritional source for American natives; the effectiveness of *S. africana-caerulea* for treating gastrointestinal and respiratory disorders was well known by south African natives (Kintzios, 2000). In the past century many species of *Salvia* became of common use in the ornamental field: the most important are *S. splendens*, largely used as an annual plant for flower beds in the gardens, and *S. farinacea*, whose use has increased a lot in the last decades (Sutton, 1999)

Recent scientific studies have confirmed therapeutic properties of many species cited in ethnobotanical literature as antioxidant or anti-inflammatory, being precious sources against bacteria, fungi and viruses, to treat cancers too (Kintzios, 2000). Species investigated in recent years have showed potentialities as source of natural pesticides and in culinary or cosmetic field. Mainly in the ornamental field the introduction in cultivation of new species has been carried out, with the selection of new varieties and hybrids with a rich and prolonged flowering (Clebsch, 2003).

At the CRA-FSO a collection of 153 accessions (species, varieties, hybrids) has been raised since year 2004 and represent at present a germplasm source available for further research studies and for potential production uses. As regard ornamental uses, some species have evidenced interesting perspectives for introduction as new floricultural crops (*S. greggii*, *S. microphylla*, *S. x jamensis*, *S. patens*, *S. leucantha*, *S. roemeriana*, *S. sinaloensis*, *S. guaranitica*); *S. dorisiana* and *S. elegans* have been recently introduced in cultivation for use in perfumery.

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