

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Growing a Garden Staple: Black & Bloom Salvia

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The genus salvia encompasses a huge amount of unique and beautiful species. Gardeners have had affection for this plant for decades and salvia has become a staple in most garden beds. There's no lack of diversity in this unique genus. With this diversity comes great new varieties every year.

Ball FloraPlant has always been known for great salvias, including breakthrough varieties like Mystic Spires Blue. For 2016, Ball FloraPlant brings another new variety into their portfolio—Salvia Black & Bloom, a new twist on the old garden favorite Black and Blue. Notable for its dark black calyx and vivid cobalt blue blooms, Black & Bloom is a striking salvia that works great in the landscape or in containers. Black & Bloom thrives in the heat and will fill a sizable amount of real estate in the garden bed.

Black & Bloom is vigorous, topping out at around 48 in. tall. The habit, vigor and tremendous flower power make Black & Bloom a true focal point in the garden. Its tubular flowers are also a magnet for hummingbirds, making it a great choice for gardeners wishing to attract wildlife.

Black & Bloom is also a great item for mixed containers; it plays an excellent role as the “thriller” component in mixed combinations. This role, paired with its excellent summer performance, has the makings for a perfect summer mixes combo program.

Managing Black & Bloom's vigor is key to producing high-quality finished plants for retail. Here are some tips to maximize the potential of Salvia Black & Bloom.

Crop time: Rooted liner to finish

Container Size	Plants Per Pot	Crop Time
4-in. to 1-qt Pots	1	7 to 9 Weeks
6-in. to 2.5-qt Pots	1 to 2	8 to 10 Weeks
10- to 12-in. Pots or Baskets	2 to 3	10 to 12 Weeks

Salvia Black & Bloom is a fast rooter and finisher.

Media & pH

Salvia Black & Bloom grows well in standard bedding plant media, such as peat- or peat-perlite- based medias. Growers should produce Black & Bloom on the slight acid side of the pH range at about 5.8.

Temperatures

Black & Bloom thrives in the heat, but will grow actively at moderate temperatures. Warm temperatures will encourage fast growth that can be difficult to manage. Ideal production temperatures are as follows: 71 to 79F (21 to 26C) days and 62 to 67F (15 to 17C) nights.

Light levels

Black & Bloom thrives in high light. Growers should provide the highest light possible in production and avoid dark conditions, as this will compromise plant habit. Ideal light levels are from 6,000 to 9,000 f.c.

Fertilizer

Salvia are moderate feeders and prefer a constant nitrate- based feed at 175 to 225 ppm. Growers should avoid fertilizer high in ammoniacal nitrogen, as this can produce soft, leggy growth and unsightly plant habits.

PGRs

Controlling Black & Bloom with proper PGR applications is critical in growing high-quality plants. Black & Bloom is very responsive to different plant growth regulator types; however, one should experiment with chemistries they're comfortable with to find the best balance of growth and control for their region. At Ball FloraPlant, we've found the most effective control to be with B-Nine and Cycocel—tank mix sprays at approximately 2,500 ppm of B-Nine and 750 ppm of Cycocel.

Low-rate Bonzi drenches are very effective, but can create an overly regulated look if applied at too high of a rate. Growers should start with very low rates of 1 to 2 ppm or lower depending on conditions.

Pest & diseases

Salvias, and Black & Bloom in particular, are generally free of major disease and insect pressures. One should scout regularly for whitefly, fungus gnats and thrips. Proper IPM practices and sanitation will be the best defense against diseases and pests.

Salvias like Black & Bloom are great plants that give growers one more tool to bring excitement to the summer retail bench. Pair Black & Bloom with its WOW flower power, attractiveness to wildlife and excellent garden performance and you have the ultimate package of a great garden plant. **GT**

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