



SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

15185 Murphy Avenue
San Martin, CA 95046
(408) 779-3303

Salvia mellifera 'Terra Seca'

The native Californian Black Sage is normally an upright sub-shrub with a woody base and semi-herbaceous branches, which will grow erectly to a height of five feet or more. It is characterized and easily identified by its large (3 inches +), oblong, sage-green leaves which are wrinkled on the upper surface and pale (white felted) beneath. These are highly aromatic and can be recognized by that characteristically pungent odour which is peculiar to this plant. The flowers are produced in compact whorls on erect flower stems and may vary in colour, according to their origins as seedling populations, from pale blue to lilac with an occasional white.

The variety 'Terra Seca' is a particularly distinct form of the Black Sage insofar as its lax branching habit causes it to develop into a prostrate, spreading, ground cover bush. In appearance it is dense and thickly foliated which is caused by the overlaying and compacting of the branching system. The flowers are typically sage-like and are pale lavender in colour, they are produced in whorls on lax stems, but are relatively insignificant. The plant will not usually exceed two feet to thirty inches in height and will spread with a flattish habit to a diameter of five feet or so.

Black Sage is a typical member of chapparal and coastal sage scrub plant communities and as such would be described as being 'drought tolerant' or a 'low water usage' plant. It will, in common with virtually any nursery grown plant, require water in its first season in order to establish it in the landscape situation, but in subsequent growing seasons will grow quite satisfactorily without supplementary watering and yet maintain a good green colour and a well foliated condition.

'Terra Seca' retains all of these basic attributes and at the same time provides a dense ground covering habit, which makes it a very useful addition to that array of plants which are available for use as ground covers in unirrigated situations and as a californian it fills a niche in a 'native' landscape.

In common with most Sages, this plant prefers, and succeeds best, in a well drained soil and dry summer

conditions. It will undoubtedly look better and greener if it is watered but it will not live to any great age, similarly if planted in heavy soils its life is also shortened from the norm.

'Terra Seca' would be particularly useful for dry banks and hillsides in 'natural' conditions and landscapes, and because of its prostrate habit would be effective in erosion control on those sufficiently steep slopes where soil loss becomes a problem.

The plant came to the Foundation in 1976 from Wayne Roderick at the Tilden Regional Parks Botanic Garden, it originated near Big Sur Lighthouse in Monterey County. It was named 'Terra Seca', and introduced in 1981 by SHF.

Low water use; ground cover; aromatic foliage.