FLOWERS · A SUNNY GARDEN EDGE OR COTTAGE-GARDEN BORDER

Let's grow salvia.

Salvia × sylvestris 'Mainacht' — May Night

This plan is for **May Night perennial salvia in a garden bed**

Is this your plant? Choose May Night, also called Mainacht; labels may say Salvia × sylvestris or Salvia nemorosa. This ornamental perennial is not culinary sage.

Purple flower spikes with a simple cut after bloom.

24 in. between plants **1 nursery plant**

Before you start

Plant in mild spring weather in a sunny, freely draining garden bed. Allow 24 inches between plant centers; this is an ornamental perennial, not a kitchen herb.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 29, 2026 View sources ↗

LIGHT

Loves full sun

Aim for at least 6 hours of direct sun for sturdy growth and flowers.

WATER

Let soil dry between drinks

Check a new root ball before it dries through. Established garden plants can dry moderately between drinks.

FEEDING

A light feeder

Start without extra fertilizer in average garden soil; check a soil test if growth stays weak.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ 1 labeled May Night (Mainacht) salvia nursery plant
- ✓ A sunny 2 × 2 ft garden patch where rain drains away
- ✓ A trowel, watering can or hose, and clean snips

THE SOIL

Average garden soil with good drainage

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One perennial plant. Here's the plan.

A sunny garden edge or cottage-garden border. Start with **nursery plant**.

THE SPACE

24 in. between plants

Allow a 2 × 2 ft garden patch for one plant. If repeating, measure 24 inches from the center of one clump to the next.

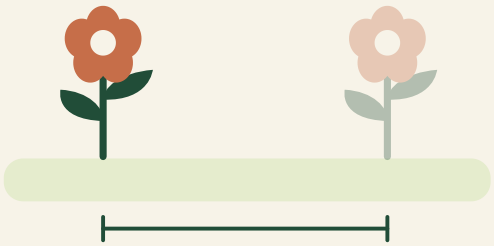
HOW MANY

1 nursery plant

Buy a plant labeled May Night or Mainacht. This is the purple ornamental perennial, not culinary sage.

THE SPACE

24 in. between plants



START WITH

1 nursery plant



Illustration · not to scale

24 in. between plants · 1 nursery plant Allow a 2 × 2 ft garden patch for one plant. If repeating, measure 24 inches from the center of one clump to the next. Buy a plant labeled May Night or Mainacht. This is the purple ornamental perennial, not culinary sage. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Check the name and space

Choose May Night, also sold as Mainacht. Mark a 2-ft-wide space in a sunny bed. The nursery tag may use Salvia nemorosa or Salvia × sylvestris; the cultivar name is the key to this plan.

02

Plant at the nursery level

Water the nursery plant, then set the top of its root ball level with the surrounding soil. Keep the crown, where stems meet the roots, at the surface. Firm the soil gently without burying that base.

03

Water to settle the roots

Water slowly around the plant until the original root ball and nearby soil are moist, not just the surface. If water runs off, pause and let it soak in. Check that root ball during the first growing season; water before it dries through, and wait while it is still moist.

04

Cut finished stalks, keep new shoots

Wait until a spike has finished flowering. Trace its old stem down to the fresh low leaves, then snip just above that growth with clean snips. Keep unopened buds, flowering stems, and new green shoots. A smaller later flush is possible, not guaranteed.

Other ways to start

Divide your own established clump

In early spring, lift a crowded plant and separate healthy pieces with roots and new shoots. Replant each at its original depth and water it in. A division retains the May Night cultivar; it is a simpler way to make a matching plant than seed.

Root a softwood cutting

This salvia can also grow from softwood cuttings. Use a healthy nonflowering shoot, remove its lower leaves, and root it in moist propagation mix in bright indirect light. Keep it sheltered until rooted; this is a propagation project rather than an instant replacement for a nursery plant.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

Check a new root ball before it dries through. Once established in a bed, let the root-zone soil dry moderately between deep waterings. Wet soil means wait, even if stems droop.

FERTILIZER

No added fertilizer for this starting plan

AMOUNT

None

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

No fertilizer dose to calculate.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

No routine feeding.

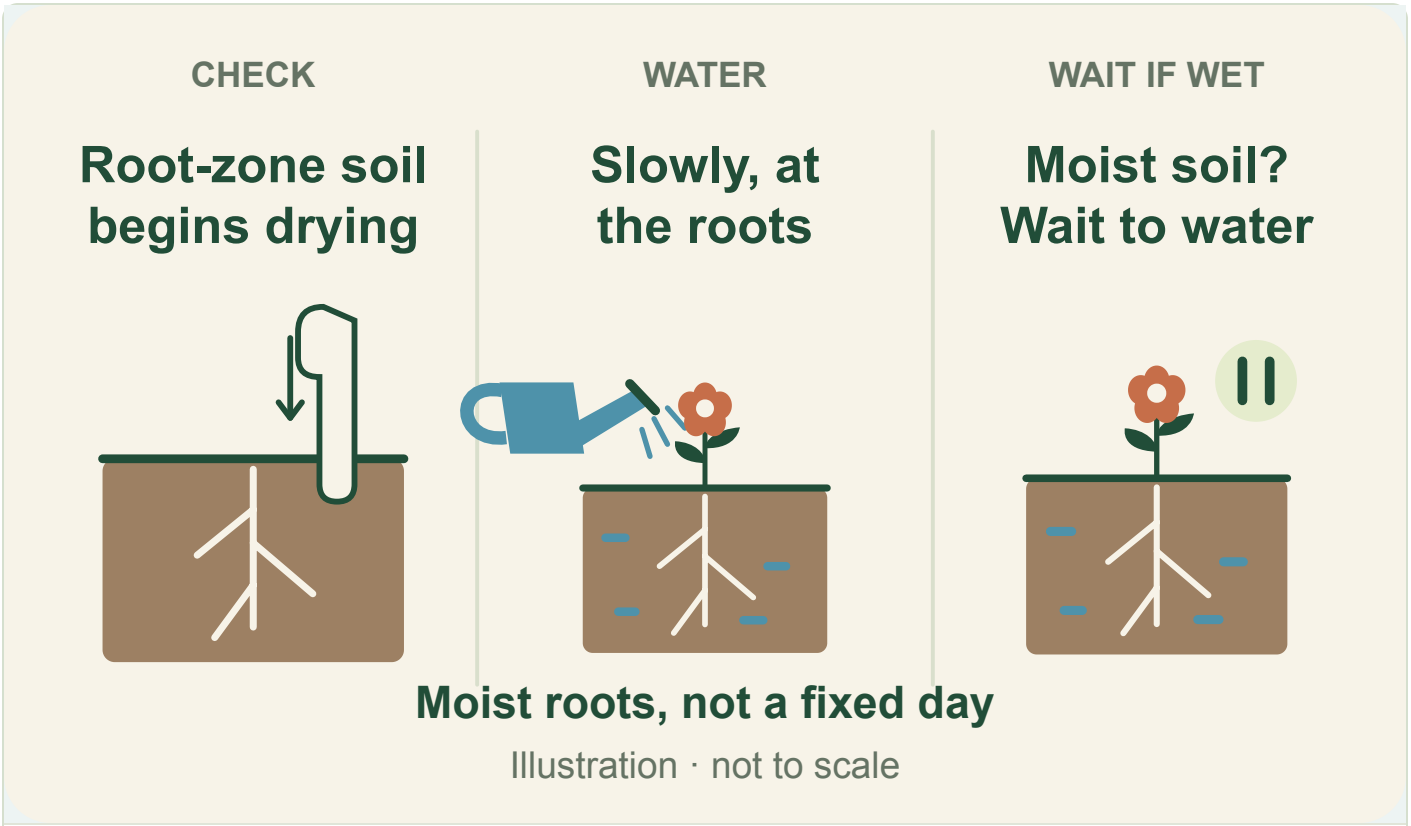
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Garden bed only: use average, freely draining soil. Check sun, drainage, and crowding before a soil-test-led feed. The patio-pot option has a separate feeding plan.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

New plant: feel the nursery root ball as well as the bed during the first growing season. Water before that small root ball dries through; nearby moist soil does not always mean the root ball is moist. Established plant: allow the root-zone soil to dry moderately, then water slowly and deeply. Check again after soaking so water has reached below the surface. A fixed number of days or gallons does not fit every soil. If the ground is still wet, skip watering even when stems droop; check drainage first.



Check before watering. Check a new root ball before it dries through. Once established in a bed, let the root-zone soil dry moderately between deep waterings. Wet soil means wait, even if stems droop. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

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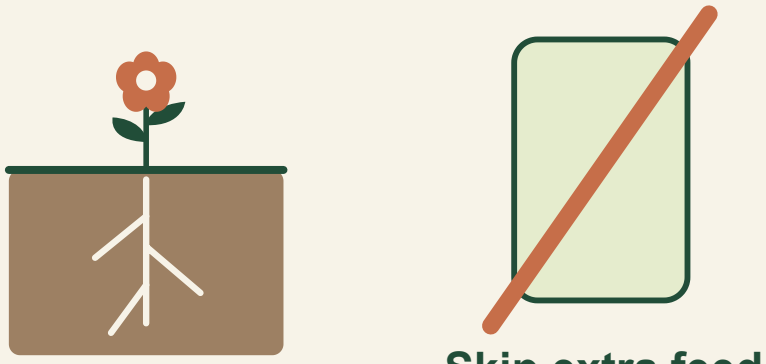
02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

For this garden-bed recipe, buy no fertilizer at planting: the starting amount is zero. Average, reasonably fertile soil is enough. More food will not replace full sun, drainage, or removing spent flower stalks.

THIS STARTING PLAN

No added fertilizer



Follow the conditions in this plan

Illustration · not to scale

None No fertilizer dose to calculate. No routine feeding. Garden bed only: use average, freely draining soil. Check sun, drainage, and crowding before a soil-test-led feed. The patio-pot option has a separate feeding plan. Original illustration; not to scale.

THE SIMPLE FEEDING PLAN

Start without extra fertilizer.

If growth stays weak, check sun, wet soil, and crowding before using a soil test to choose an amendment and rate. Heavy feeding can make stems soft and floppy. This no-routine-feed plan applies to a garden bed; the separate patio-pot option below needs its own nutrient supply.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

First flowers and a possible repeat flush

May Night usually reaches roughly 18–24 inches tall and wide, with deep violet-blue spikes in early summer. Removing the first finished stems can lead to another flush later, often with fewer or smaller flowers. A newly planted clump may take time to fill its allotted space.

Spring planting and winter dormancy

Plant in mild spring weather once the ground is workable, rather than during a heat wave or into frozen soil. Monrovia lists May Night for USDA zones 4–9; performance still depends on the site and winter drainage. This plant dies back in cold weather and starts new leafy growth from its base in spring.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

PHOTO NOTES

Flower spikes in the garden.

Look at the upright flower spikes and the lower leafy clump before reading the pruning steps. These are separate garden views, not before-and-after pruning photos. The pictured varieties are unconfirmed; this guide uses 'May Night'.



Flower spikes rise above a lower leafy clump. Use the pruning diagram to locate the foliage you keep; this photo does not mark a cut point.

Photo supplied by jennyzhuang.



A mixed border shows different flower heights and colors. The pictured plants' spacing and varieties are unknown, so use the named plant's own planting plan.

Photo supplied by jennyzhuang.

Something looking off?

Is this the salvia used as a kitchen herb?

No. May Night is an ornamental perennial grown for purple flowers. Culinary garden sage is Salvia officinalis, a different plant. Keep this nursery flower planting ornamental.

Why does my label say Salvia nemorosa?

May Night is also called Mainacht. Nurseries use both Salvia nemorosa and Salvia × sylvestris for this cultivar, and the RHS lists these names as synonyms. Match the cultivar, not just the broad word “salvia.”

When should I cut back May Night salvia?

After its first flower spikes finish, follow the old stalks down to fresh low foliage and cut just above it. Keep stems that still have flowers or unopened buds. In cold or exposed gardens, leave the final old top growth for winter and clean it up as spring shoots appear. Do not use this method for every type of salvia.

Why has my salvia not bloomed again after cutting?

A cut can encourage new growth, but another flush is not certain. Check whether the plant has full sun and whether its root zone has become very dry. Later flowers are often fewer or smaller. Keep healthy new leaves and allow time; repeatedly cutting those leaves or adding extra fertilizer is not the next step.

Can I grow May Night salvia in a pot?

Yes. Use the patio-pot option below: one plant in a draining 6-US-gallon container about 12 inches deep. This is our roomy starting choice based on general perennial-container guidance, not a proven minimum for every May Night plant. Check the mix daily in summer; garden drought tolerance does not mean a pot can be left dry.

My salvia is floppy or wilting. Should I water or feed it?

Feel the soil first. Dry roots may need a slow, thorough drink; wet roots need a drainage check, not another drink. For floppy stems, also check shade, crowding, and heavy feeding. Once a stalk has finished flowering, trim it back to fresh low foliage. If decline continues in wet soil, ask your local Extension service to assess the plant rather than guessing at fertilizer.

After-bloom pruning, patio pots, and winter care

Cut old spikes while keeping new shoots

A finished spike has lost its open flowers; a spike with unopened buds is not finished. Part the old stems so you can see the fresh leafy growth near the base. Trace and snip each spent stalk just above that growth instead of shearing straight across the whole clump. Keep the healthy low leaves. Check soil moisture afterward; do not automatically add water or fertilizer because you pruned.

Choose a pot and check its moisture

Our container option is one nursery plant in a 6-US-gallon pot about 12 inches deep, with open drainage holes and packaged outdoor potting mix. This is a roomy editorial starting choice within Maryland Extension's general guidance for flowering perennials. Keep the crown at the surface. In summer, check daily: when the top 1–2 inches begin to dry, water until excess drains, then empty the saucer. Wait if the mix is moist; do not let the entire pot dry through.

Feed a patio pot separately

Use the starter fertilizer already in fresh potting mix first. After that supply is used up, one US product option is Jack's Classic Blossom Booster 10-30-20: mix 1 level tablespoon in 1 US gallon of water and feed once a month during active growth. This combines the manufacturer's outdoor mixing strength with the RHS's monthly container-salvia schedule; it is not a May Night fertilizer trial. Apply only the amount needed to water the pot, not a whole gallon by default. Do not stack it with a slow-release feed. Pause while the plant is dormant, badly wilted, or sitting in wet mix.

Care for the crown through winter

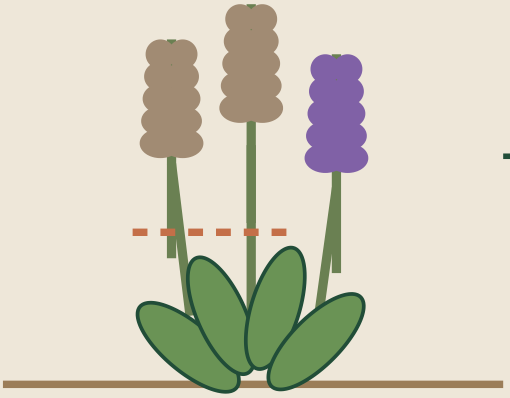
In a cold or exposed bed, leave the last old top growth through winter, then remove dead stems when spring shoots appear. Keep piled mulch off the crown. Divide a crowded or weakening clump in early spring, keeping healthy rooted pieces; leave vigorous clumps alone. A pot exposes roots to more cold than the ground does: in freezing regions, plant it into the ground before winter or sink its container into garden soil for protection. The garden-bed zone rating is not a guarantee for a pot left above ground.

Where to cut the finished spikes

May Night: keep the fresh low growth

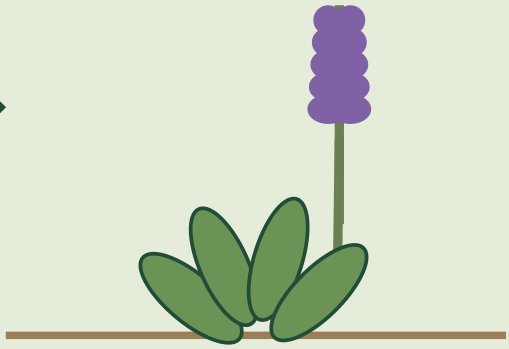
Finished spikes come off. New shoots stay.

Most flowers faded



Trace each finished stem

After the cut



New growth stays

1. Keep buds and open flowers.

2. Cut spent stalks just above fresh low growth.

A later flush may be smaller, or may not appear.

Herbaceous May Night only · not a cut-height scale

Brown spent stalks come off; buds, open flowers, and fresh leaves stay. Follow each finished stem down before cutting. The line shows which growth to preserve, not a fixed number of inches above the soil. This method is for May Night perennial salvia.

Pruning: NC State. Repeat flowers may be fewer or smaller: Walters Gardens. Original teaching schematic, not an exact cutting-height measurement.

Help with your next step.

Check drainage before choosing a pot

A container must drain freely; the garden-bed no-feed plan does not automatically apply to potting mix.

Compare other flower projects

Choose by your growing space and the named plant type, not by flower color alone.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- NC State: wood sage identity, drainage, pruning, and propagation ↗
  https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/salvia-x-sylvestris/
- RHS: May Night and Mainacht naming, including nemorosa synonyms ↗
  https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/16376/salvia-sylvestris-may-night/details
- RHS: garden versus container feeding, watering, and winter pruning ↗
  https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/salvia/growing-guide
- Monrovia: May Night size, zones, and establishment watering ↗
  https://www.monrovia.com/may-night-sage.html
- Walters Gardens: May Night garden care and realistic repeat flowering ↗
  https://www.waltersgardens.com/variety.php?ID=SALMN
- Illinois Extension: perennial planting depth and overfeeding ↗
  https://extension.illinois.edu/flowers/planting-and-care
- Maryland Extension: soil-test-led perennial feeding and crown-safe mulch ↗
  https://www.extension.umd.edu/resource/care-annuals-and-perennials
- Oregon State: how to divide an established perennial ↗
  https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/how-when-divide-perennials-healthier-more-productive-plants
- Maryland Extension: container volume, depth, and drainage for flowering perennials ↗
  https://www.extension.umd.edu/resource/types-containers-growing-vegetables
- Iowa State: container moisture checks and starter fertilizer ↗
  https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/how-to/care-plants-growing-containers
- Iowa State: protecting the roots of potted perennials in winter ↗
  https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/faq/i-cant-plant-my-perennials-winter-how-do-i-keep-them-alive-until-next-spring
- JR Peters: Jack's Classic Blossom Booster 10-30-20 product ↗
  https://www.jrpeters.com/online-store/Blossom-Booster-10-30-20-p184837332
- JR Peters: outdoor mixing directions for Blossom Booster ↗
  https://www.jrpeters.com/copy-of-draft-resources-for-garden-ce
- Heritage Perennials: May Night size and spring division ↗
  https://www.perennials.com/plants/salvia-sylvestris-may-night.html
- Illinois Extension: vegetative propagation preserves the parent ↗
  https://extension.illinois.edu/houseplants/propagation

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.