Eranthemum pulchellum

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Introduction

This spreading shrub is exceptional for its rich blue flowers which occur in terminal spikes during the early winter season (Fig. 1). The 3- to 6-inch-long flower spikes are borne above the large, rounded and prominently veined leaves. The plant even looks great in foliage without flowers. Blue Sage will attain a height of 4 to 6 feet and has a 1 to 3 foot spread.

General Information

Scientific name: Eranthemum pulchellum  
Pronunciation: eer-RANTh-ee-mum pul-KEL-um  
Common name(s): Blue Sage  
Family: Acanthaceae  
Plant type: shrub  
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round  
Origin: not native to North America  
Uses: specimen; border  
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet  
Spread: 1 to 3 feet  
Plant habit: spreading; upright  
Plant density: moderate  
Growth rate: fast  
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: serrate  
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Figure 1. Blue Sage.
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: blue
Flower characteristic: winter flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: acidic; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance:
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other
Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
Use and Management

This plant may be used in mass color plantings and herbaceous borders. It is also striking as a specimen or container plant on a patio or deck.

Blue Sage prefers rich, acid, well-drained soils. It will perform well in a site which receives partial to full shade, but the plant has a poor salt tolerance. *Eranthemum pulchellum* will produce more blooms and remain compact if the plant is severely cut back after flowering. Cut the plant to the ground after frost; new shoots will appear when the weather gets warm.

*Take softwood cuttings to propagate Blue Sage.*

Pests and Diseases

*Nematodes, mites, and cottony cushion scale may be seen on Blue Sage. Blue Sage is not susceptible to any notable diseases.*