

- **What is the difference between *Salvia elegans* and *Salvia gesnerifolia*?**

In describing both plants, there are several similarities. Both originate in the Mexican Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains between elevations of 7,500 ft. to 10,000 ft. In the wild they grow larger than in cultivated gardens. Both have woody stems, green, ovate, hairy and fragrant leaves. Flowers are 2 lipped and tubular, and are popular with birds (hummingbirds, in particular), bees, and butterflies, and bloom late in the growing season. Both salvias require good drainage and dislike winter wet. The plants are fast growing, and heat and drought tolerant. Both salvias are deer and rabbit tolerant.

Gardeners in our area will be more familiar with *salvia elegans*, or pineapple sage. It grows in zones 8a to 11b (the larger number would be a heated greenhouse rather than outside). Container grown plants can be overwintered inside but outdoor growing ones could be considered annuals if there is a hard frost. In mild climates like ours it may overwinter. The height pineapple sage grows is 12-18 inches and width is 16-20 inches. A cultivar of pineapple sage has light green-yellow leaves and would benefit from a little afternoon shade in hot areas. Flowers are up to an inch long, arranged in whorls around the stem.

The *salvia gesneriflora* is a taller and wider plant in cultivation, growing 5-6 ft. tall and 3 to 4 ft. wide. Flowers are 1.5 inches long and have dark calyxes in the popular red flowered Tequila cultivar. There are pink flowering *gesneriflora* with green calyxes. This *salvia* is dramatic and an aggressive grower. It is not one I have found being grown for sale in our area. It is a popular plant in some Australian and Californian gardens and needs to be protected from strong winds and rain, likely why it wouldn't do well in our wet winters.

Sources:

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=292043&isprofile=1&gen=Salvia>

https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/Search-Results?form-mode=true&context=b%3D10%26hf%3D10%26l%3Den%26q%3Dsalvia%26s%3Ddesc%2528plant_merged%2529%26sl%3DplantForm&query=salvia%20elegans

<https://www.provenwinners.com/plants/salvia/pineapple-sage-salvia-elegans>

<https://wimastergardener.org/article/pineapple-sage-salvia-elegans/>