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**Wildflower Spot – April 2012**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## LYRE-LEAVED SAGE

*Salvia lyrata*

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Very commonly seen on woodland walks in early spring, this perennial has lipped lavender-blue flowers, about an inch long, in whorls around a square stem. Lyre-leaved Sage is a fibrous-rooted perennial with a hairy stem, growing 1-2 feet tall. The leaves are mostly at the base, usually deeply lobed (“lyre-shaped”) and long-stalked, forming a rosette. Stem leaves are few or more, entire, and wavy-toothed or lobed.

Blooming April through June, the trumpet-shaped flowers are attractive to bees and butterflies. When a bee lands on the exposed lower lip, the stamens are tipped, dusting the insect with pollen.

Lyre-leaved Sage is easy to grow in average soil in full sun or part shade. The plant will tolerate clay, rocky or wet soil, heat and humidity. Self-seeding, it will naturalize in good growing conditions. Plantings work well in cottage gardens, borders, naturalized areas, moist spots, or along streams or ponds. It is native to every county in Virginia, and ranges from Connecticut



to southern Ohio and Missouri, and south to Florida and Texas.

The plant is also known as “Cancerweed,” since the leaves were once thought to be an external cure for cancer. The genus name comes from the Latin *salvare*, meaning “to save or heal.” Native Americans used the root in ointments for sores and whole-plant tea medicinally. ❖

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**Photo:** Lyre-leaved Sage (*Salvia lyrata*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
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