



# Lilac Newsletter

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INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

**INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY** is a non-profit corporation comprised of individuals who share a particular interest, appreciation and fondness for lilacs. Through exchange of knowledge, experience and facts gained by members it is helping to promote, educate and broaden public understanding and awareness.

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THE LILAC - BEST LOVED "BLIZZARD BELT" SHRUB

- Mabel L. Franklin

In writing this during our present slow cold spring, with freezing temperatures predicted, I am reminded of years when frost has nipped the buds of our well loved early spring blooming lilac. Only once did the tender young leaves turn black from freezing, fall off and have to grow again. This happened one spring, many years ago, to my father's plantings in Bismarck, North Dakota. In more recent years there was one late spring frost that almost ruined the bloom of the single lilacs. The doubles, most of which are later to bloom than the singles, were not affected.

Recounting injuries to lilac bloom certainly need not be discouraging. The bloom is seldom injured and the bush always survives. Stems never freeze back in winter. In fact, the lilac is one of our most durable shrubs. Lilacs still grow on the sites of former New England farm houses, the only cultivated plant that has withstood the onslaught of time, neglect, the weather, fire and flood.

The lilac has adapted itself so well to the mid-latitudes of North America that it seems indigenous to our land. But it was brought here by colonists from Europe. Washington planted the "Lilak" at Mount Vernon where the bushes are still to be seen. It had come originally from central Eurasia where it grows wild. It was cultivated by "Kubla Kahn" and was perhaps one of the treasures brought by Marco Polo. It flourished in the manor gardens and parks of Europe, becoming an object of the hybridizers interest after 1860.

In the French nurseries most of the showy cultivars of Syringa vulgaris (lilac) have been produced. There were Lemoine, Baltet, and LeGraye of France, Buchner and Spaeth of Germany, and later the American hybridizers, Dunbar and T.A. Havemeyer, and the more recent Canadian breeders, Skinner and Preston. Lemoine is the master, having produced more fine selections than all the others combined.

The lilac is a tall growing shrub. There are no dwarfs, only slow growers. In 20 to 25 years they will reach a height of 20 to 25 feet in a good location. Of course, lack of care and poor soil may dwarf them, as it does all plants. One sees very few well-cared-for lilacs.

Keeping the lilac at a preferred height is mainly a matter of pruning. No pruning is needed when the bush is small, and there should be no cutting of blooms with long stems. When the bush has grown a foot higher than desired then cut bloom from the top, and prune as you cut bloom. Don't behead the lilac or cut bloom from one side only. Beheading will cut off next year's bloom and cutting from only one side will make the bush lopsided. To prune for density, cut very low, not the tips of the branches. Don't cut off too many suckers or the plant will look leggy.

Most lilacs spread some, by means of suckers. They will send out shoots several feet away from the bush if the ground near is shaded. By means of suckers the plant renews itself. Welcome the shoots at the center of the bush, these will have larger blooms than the old wood, and will take the place of the older stems later. The shoots at the edge of the plant and beyond can be cut off easily with a sharp spade. Cut below the ground level. If the lilac bush is at the edge of the lawn mow off the shoots.

Choose a sunny well drained location for lilacs. The soil should be fairly rich. A little well balanced fertilizer helps them get started after transplanting. The addition of lime will give more bloom. Water only during dry periods --lilac is not a bog plant. Give it room to spread.

#### Lilac Season Lengthens

The earliest lilac species to bloom is S. x hyacinthiflora, so named because the fragrance is like that of hyacinths. Lilac perfume is so well loved there is really no reason for a lilac to smell like a hyacinth, but this hybrid does. The leaf is not heart shaped and smooth, but longer and more veined. Hyacinthiflora is a tall slender bush. Its colors are mauve-pink, lavender-blue, single and double. Of these, the selection 'Lamartine' seems to be most popular.

The next to bloom are the so-called French cultivars of the common lilac, the showiest of all. Chalk-white, steel-blue, lilac-pink, orchid, deep reddish-purple, blue-violet. No poppy brightness, but pastel shades. Colors vary from early sun-up to evening, in sun differing from in shade; colors change from opening bud to fading flower and also differ within and out of the house -- all interesting and fleeting.

Later species, blooming after the French Lilac show is almost over, are the Persian, *S. persica* with the small leaf, the Rouen Lilac, *S. x chinensis* (often sold as Persian and used for hedges as it does not spread), the Hungarian, *S. julianae* and the Late Lilac, *S. villosa*. All of these grow to very tall bushes, have small florets, pale colors, large clusters of bloom, heavy fragrance and large leaves.

Still later come the Preston hybrids originated in Canada by Isabelle Preston. Tall, large leaved, with small florets and heavy fragrance, they come in pink and shades of violet. The pink 'Isabella' is a favorite of this group.

Last of all the Japanese Tree Lilac, *S. reticulata* blooms. A beautiful small tree suitable for lawns, small gardens and patios, its bark is shiny like a plum tree, its branching graceful, its head domed. Its creamy white flower clusters have a delicate fragrance unlike any other lilac. It is native of Japan where it is found growing wild.

#### Good Lilac Selections

- 'Alphonse Lavallee' (D) \* - Deep purple in bud, opening to periwinkle blue to azure. Fringy florets. Fragrant.
- 'Andenken an Ludwig Späth' (S) \* - Dark red-purple. Holds colour
- 'Belle de Nancy' (D) - Satiny rose, fading pinker.
- 'Capitaine Baltet' (S) - Gigantic florets and bloom spikes of rosy mauve. Showy.
- 'Charles Joly' (D) - Deep wine-red. Slender bush.
- 'Charles X' (S) - Reddish purple, bright buds.

\* (D) \* (S) = double/single

- 'Jacques Callot' (S) - Orchid pink, very lovely.  
'Lucie Baltet' (S) - Light Coral pink.  
'Macrostachya' (S) - Soft pink, dainty.  
'Marie LeGraye' (S) - Showy white, good for cutting.  
'Mme. Lemoine' (D) - Popular white, large spikes.  
'Mrs. Calvin Coolidge' (S) - Deep reddish purple.  
'Paul Thirion' (D) - Claret rose buds open to deep lavender-mauve, to dusty pink. Long season of bloom.  
'President Grevy' (D) - Early blue with orchid buds.  
'President Viger' (D) - Late blue, slender spikes.  
'Princess Alexandra' (S) - Early white for cutting.  
'Vestale' (S) - Rated best single white.  
'Violetta' (D) - Violet-mauve. Long season.  
'Berryer' (D) - An early hyacinthiflora with the fragrance of hyacinths. Lavender.  
'Isabella' (S) - Broad leaves, tall, light pink. Late prestonae lilac developed in Canada.  
'Lamartine' (S) - Early hyacinthiflora, orchid pink, tall growing slender bush.  
x chinensis (S) - Large trusses of lavender with very heavy fragrance, blooming just after the French hybrids.  
reticulata (S) - The Japanese Tree Lilac. Large creamy spikes in June.

Editors note: This article first appeared in The MINNESOTA HORTICULTURIST in June 1966, and is reprinted here by permission of both the author, Miss Mabel Franklin, and the publisher, Minnesota State Horticultural Society.

TWELVE DUNBAR LILACS

- Robert B. Clark, Meredith, NH.

John Dunbar, assistant superintendent of parks, Rochester, New York, planted about one hundred lilacs in the early 1890's at Highland Park. Four years later they bloomed sufficiently well to attract Rochesterians in crowds through notices in the newspapers. Dunbar, a Scots gardener, was greatly encouraged, and by 1908 had raised seedlings of seven of these mostly French hybrid lilacs. Six years later he raised a second lot from seeds of the Lemoine cultivars, all, that is, except those of 'A.B. Lamberton', one of his own hybrids. Dunbar used only open pollinated seed. He was however, careful to keep accurate records. From these it becomes apparent that one of his breeding objectives was to "improve" the dark purple lilac.

From the first batch of hybrid seedlings which matured just prior to World War 1, Dunbar watched the development of some seventy-five plants, and eventually (about 1916) selected nineteen cultivars which he deemed worthy of releasing into commerce. I have not found the records for their commercial introduction; however, eight of these first Dunbar lilac seedlings did find their way into "the trade" -- two of which made it big: 'President Lincoln' and 'Adelaide Dunbar'. Of the latter seedling population he selected only about four dozen of which he released eleven, only four making it into commerce. This makes twelve Dunbar selections available from nurserymen at one time or another. But these are not necessarily the ones which I shall be discussing. Those which I have chosen are the ones which Dunbar himself or others have found noteworthy.

No. 1 is 'President Lincoln' which according to Dunbar is "perhaps the bluest of the single-flowered Lilacs in cultivation". Its colour is "unusual among lilacs", according to Susan McKelvey, monographer of LILACS (1928). 'President Lincoln' remains today the standard for blue in lilacs, even though the hue is more violet than blue. Dunbar called it "Wedgewood" blue. This cultivar is a seedling of the old-fashioned 'Alba Virginalis' and is among the very earliest of common lilacs to bloom. Also, it is a

vigorous grower -- so much so that the long thyrses are frequently hidden among the rapidly lengthening shoots before the flowers fade.

White-flowering lilacs do not necessarily produce white-flowered seedlings. 'A.B. Lambertson', mentioned above, which commemorates the longtime president of the board of the Rochester Park Commissioners is a violet lavender selection of the once standard forcing lilac, 'Marie LeGrave', a single white. This seedling is characterized by florets an inch in diameter which are borne on rather large thyrses. Its growth habit is somewhat compact with slightly twisted branches. Dunbar collected seed of this cultivar in the second batch that he grew.

Of 'General Sherman' (the lilac, that is) Dunbar, using the royal plural, modestly says, "we consider this (cultivar) perhaps one of the most beautiful of Lilacs in cultivation". Deep lavender in bud the florets open to a creamy lavender-lilac with a faint tinge of porcelain blue in the center. Immense Thyrses are actually pyramidal, or "many-shouldered" as Dunbar called them. Havemeyer classes this cultivar as "formal", lilac-pink. It is a seedling of 'Marlyensis Pallida', as is 'William C. Barry', which commemorates the partner of the once celebrated nursery firm of Ellwanger and Barry, and bears flowers strikingly similar to the parent plant. Dunbar professes an especial fondness for the silvery or pearly-lavender hue of this cultivar which he calls "decidedly charming". He mentions also that in structure the thyrses is "many-shouldered". The plant is vigorous and tall growing in habit, and its flowers according to Havemeyer are light blue.

The single purple 'Aline Moequeris' was sensational during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore it is not surprising that Dunbar raised seedlings of it, eight of which he released. I discuss three -- 'Adelaide Dunbar' popularly considered his masterpiece, he dedicated to his wife, holding that it is "perhaps the darkest double-flowering Lilac in cultivation". Borne from large thyrses the florets open maroon or dark crimson, turning a violet-red when fully expanded. The unfolding leaves are slightly copper-coloured. A sibling, 'President Roosevelt' (for



"Teddy" of course), which is "most attractive" in Dunbar's opinion, is the many-clustered cultivar with claret red to purplish red flowers. Another sibling, 'General John Pershing' is a "remarkably beautiful" free-flowering semi-double flowered lilac whose florets are tinged a very delicate azure lilac.

The second batch of Dunbar seedlings contained the following five noteworthy selections, three from contemporary Lemoine cultivars, two from his own hybrids. None of these later Dunbar lilacs has achieved the popularity of the earlier ones although most of them are indeed the equal or superior to the better known choices.

The late flowering 'Elihu Root' which honors the Secretary of State during the earlier Roosevelt administration, bears rather large azure-lavender florets on dense thyrses. This cultivar is a seedling of 'Gilbert' (Lemoine 1911), single, lilac coloured. Dunbar selected two hybrids of 'Thunberg' (Lemoine 1913), each a double-flowering white, although the parent is double and lilac in colour. One he dedicated to his granddaughter, 'Joan Dunbar', the second to 'President John Adams'. The former bears "somewhat star-shaped" florets which produce a "fleecy" effect, which Mrs. McKelvey applauds as "well chosen". The latter is of dwarf (read: slow-growing) habit with compact flower clusters.

The last pair of Dunbar cultivars are F<sub>2</sub> seedlings of 'Marie LeGrave' through 'A.B. Lamberton', already described. 'Henry Clay' is a "showy" white with rather large florets. The second, 'Alexander Hamilton' bears remarkably large florets, one and five-sixteenth inches across, violet-lavender in colour, in large dense thyrses. Mrs. McKelvey characterizes this selection as "showy".

Dunbar summarized his work with lilacs in an article which appeared in the Florists Exchange, Sept. 22, 1923 (p. 831). He lived to see the importance of lilacs to the average American; indeed, he may well be the one who started it all. A bronze plaque beyond the Pansy Bed at Highland Park pays tribute to his memory.

APHID CONTROL - -

The seven-spotted ladybird beetle, the most important aphid predator in Europe, Asia, and North Africa and a cousin to the American ladybug, is now established in several parts of the United States, according to USDA Agricultural Research Service scientists.

If sufficient numbers of the beetle can be obtained and established widely throughout the country, it may prove a successful biological control for many species of aphids.

The beetle was found to be the most important factor controlling the pea aphid in an alfalfa plot on the University of Delaware farm at Newark during the spring of 1977; the most abundant aphid predator on legumes and fruit trees at ARS experimental farm Byron, Ga., in the spring of 1977; and at the Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, was found feeding on several species of aphids, including the greenbug and pea aphids in hairy vetch and alfalfa.

Editors note:

This brief report appeared in the American Horticultural Society NEWS & VIEWS of Nov. 1977. While aphids are not a serious problem in the care of lilacs, this bit of information is here reprinted so that you might become aware of the natural predator control approach to the insect problem - the "Rise and Fall of the mighty as-it-were." Note the disclaimer "may prove successful" - it is this writers belief as surely as the predator follows the harmful insect, the latter will return in great numbers as soon as the enemy numbers drop to a minimal population.

BITS OF WITS

LORD, WHEN we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with.

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In gardening, it's a race between your back and your enthusiasm - to see which will give out first.

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When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt.

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The more you listen to political speeches, the more you realize that ours is, indeed, a land of promise.

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Prejudice is merely a lazy person's substitute for thinking.

STOP - LOOK - LISTEN - and get your \$\$ worth:

On your way to Lima, Penna. next May, stop and see an extra patch of Lilacs (maybe two), visit with a member and spread the work and intent of ILS. I've recently had a little correspondence with Donald M. Lupold, R.D. #2, Muncy, Pa. (Jan./78 issue). Don has a pretty respectable collection and attended the Annual Mtgs. up until a couple of years ago when a couple of problems sort of knocked him down, and now his eyes are fogging his vision a little, so he stays kinda close to home, but he'd surely enjoy some visitors (even if only for a brief look). He's out there about 12 or 15 mi. E. of Williamsport and about the same distance N. of Int. 80 right on Rt. 147 just about 2 mi. out of town.