



Lilac Newsletter

Vol. IX, No. 9, September, 1983

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.

Articles printed in this publication are the views and opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the editor or the *International Lilac Society*.

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PLANTING LILACS WITH MAX PETERSON

How do you plant a lilac? This is the question most often asked by people who tour the lilacs at Meadowlark Hill in Western Nebraska. The usual answer is: "Dig a hole, stick the lilac into the hole, water it and then stand back". Now this is a tongue in cheek sort of answer but, basically, it is how we plant a lilac.

In Western Nebraska we are blessed with loose friable soil that has just a touch of sand in it. Therefore, digging an extra large hole and loosening soil in the bottom of the hole is unnecessary as the vigorous roots of the lilac will easily penetrate. A planting hole just large enough to accommodate the roots is adequate.

For you people who are not blessed with this type of soil, a little more preparation might be necessary. The following is a fairly general schedule of what to do with your newly arrived lilac plants.

If you do not plan to immediately plant the lilac plants you receive through the mail, leave them in the wrapping and set them in a cool place until you are ready. This should take care of them for two or three days, but if you must wait longer (I once had a shipment arrive during a blizzard which dumped 30 inches of snow around), you had better unwrap them and check them for moisture. Make sure the material that is wrapped around the roots is moist. Then repack them and they can lay for about a week. Of course, it is always best to plant them immediately upon arrival. Lilacs potted in soil can be planted at your leisure.

Before planting your lilacs unpack them and place them in a bucket of water for at least 24 hours. (Do not leave the roots in water indefinitely, however). We have an old stock tank that is full of water and we throw the whole plant into it. While plants are soaking prepare the planting hole. If your soil is thin and hard-

packed (God forbid) then you have your work cut out for you. Dig the hole at least two feet wide and two feet deep. Add humus or compost and well rotted manure (if you can get it) to the dirt that you have removed from the hole.

Once the hole is prepared then the plant can be removed from the water. Check it carefully for the graft line or knobby protrusion. In my opinion it is best to plant 'Own root' plants but they are difficult to find. Inquire whether the lilacs you are purchasing are grafted, and whether they are grafted onto Green Ash, Privet or common lilac. With Ash and Privet there will be no problem identifying the suckers growing from the root area, but with those grafted onto common lilac you will have a terrible time knowing the unwanted suckers from the desired lilac.

Plant the graft line at least six to eight inches below the surface of the ground. This will allow the lilac to put its own roots out and in a matter of time become 'Own rooted'. You can usually tell the graft line by checking carefully along the bottom stem. You will probably see a slight bulge and a different coloration on either side of the bulge.

Planting: When the planting hole is ready and the plant is soaked, carry it in a bucket of water to the planting site. Do not take it out of the water until you are ready to plant. Some people will take the plant out of the water and hand carry it to the hole on a hot, windy day and then wonder why their plant did not leaf out. Place the plant in the hole (remember the graft line), spread the roots out and start putting the dirt back into the hole. Cover the roots and fill the hole about halfway. Then take a good grip on the lilac stem with your hand and step down into the hole to tamp the soil down firmly. Now, fill the hole with water and walk away whistling. Go back in a little while and see if the water has disappeared. When it finally does fill it up again and walk away whistling a different tune.

In a little while check it again--it will take longer to disappear this time and when it does fill the rest of the hole with loose dirt. Pack very firmly with your hands and then make a watering basin around the lilac with some loose soil. Stand back and admire the beautiful job you have done.

Now comes the big debate--do you trim the top or don't you? If you want a little bushier plant I would advise cutting off about one-third of the top, but it is entirely up to you. With a little luck and proper watering, the lilac will start quite easily either way.

Watering: This is the time the watering situation becomes critical. There is one good plan to follow. Water three times the first week and once weekly thereafter until about the first of September. Then let up on the water and allow the plant to get a little dry. I don't mean to let it simply die from lack of water, but use a little less from September on.

After the first good hard freeze water thoroughly and then go back smugly into the house and pat yourself on the back for having done such a professional job.

About planting sites for lilacs: A place in your yard with full sun is best. Do not, and I repeat, do not plant a lilac under an umbrella of trees. A lilac must have at least a half day of sun to bloom well. All day sun is much better.

In locating your lilac think not only about the beautiful blossoms but also the fragrance. Wouldn't a lilac be lovely outside the kitchen window or near the bedroom where the fragrance can drift through your window.

Check site carefully for standing water in the wintertime. Nothing will kill a lilac more quickly than soggy feet during the winter. It must have good drainage. Here in Nebraska we don't really worry about that. We worry about getting enough water to the plant in the fall to carry it through the winter.

An important point not generally understood by the public: A lot of people will plant a lilac into the sod of a grass lawn. They will allow the grass to come right up to the base of the lilac and actually engulf the plant with grass. I have seen lilacs planted only a few months with grass higher than the plants themselves. Grasses put out a toxin that inhibits the growth of shrubs and trees newly planted into them. This often is the cause when lilacs do not grow. It is perfectly alright to plant a lilac in such an area, but you must prepare the area properly to have success with your planting. Just remove the sod in a three-foot circle and then keep the grass at least a foot away from the base of the lilac. Once the plant grows to four feet high, the toxin becomes ineffective and the plant will not suffer from it. However, if you let the grass grow, you will not lose the plant but it will grow very, very slow and will probably not bloom at all for many years.

Well, I hope this explains how to plant a lilac - when you think about it, it really isn't complicated now is it?

Fall Fertilization and Watering of Lilacs

Fall is a good time to fertilize lilacs according to reports from past issues of the Newsletter and from members who have passed on this information from their own experiences. Use either organic material or commercial fertilizer commonly used for woody plants.

And, remember to water your lilacs if you do not get adequate rain. You don't want the roots dry going into winter.

- Editor

NEW LILACS FROM OLD

By - Walter E. Eickhorst

Increasing of lilac stock via suckers (root shoots, or whatever) is probably the oldest method known, but there is, like all other means of reproduction, a pitfall or two. First, the plant you are considering must be on its own roots, i.e., generally speaking if the parent plant has many stems and all appear to have the same size and colour of flower (considering those that are large enough to bloom), then any that are small enough to dig for new stock plants almost surely will be O.K.

Consider first the time of year when your effort might be most successful. I'm sure that there's somebody out there that'll challenge the optimum time and say that it can be done almost any time - all things being equal that may be true for the person who has some sort of appreciation for the care and handling of such bits of plant life. In my book I'd much prefer to wait for that period of fall (depending on your location) when the plants have been frosted a time or two and the foliage is just beginning to drop. Anytime from then until the soil is frozen will be great.

Select the vigorous shoots farthest away from the mother stems. Plunge a sharp spade between the shoot and the parent plant about six or eight inches away from the little plant - you'll really appreciate the sharp spade. Work about midway between plant and sucker, lift lightly as you dig and pry with the spade and you should get a good mass of the little feeder roots. If possible, immediately plant in the new site, or, at least keep the roots protected by wrapping in a moist burlap until ready to cover with soil. Trim away damaged or torn roots to a clean sharp cut. When the planting is done, water and mulch, and it should be in good shape to go into winter. WHOOPS, go back there now

and prune away about one-half to one-third of that which you just planted. This is to compensate for shock of transplanting,

Why not consider spring for this operation, you might ask? Well, firstly, lilacs begin to break bud almost before you think to look at your garden and when the buds begin to move you know that growth is underway. Moving the plant at this time is much more shocking to it. The hot days of early summer arrive too quickly and then the spring planted individual is really struggling to stay alive. It wilts, you come forth with extra water, little response, more water, and before you know it the poor little guy has drowned. Nope, Fall is the best. Why? 'cause the plant that is handled in mid to late October generally has at least six to eight weeks in which to become settled in the soil, even make a bit of new growth and is all 'heads up' and ready when spring arrives.

Now if you want to plant the little lilac into a container that's another can-of-worms. The procedure is much the same, use a good soil mix, and you'll have better success if you plunge the pot into a good layer of wood chips or some other well aerated material so that the roots don't cook in the otherwise exposed pot.

Try a few for kicks - the first ones may not all be successes but hang in there, ask a few questions, experiment a bit and before you know it, you too will be an avid grower in your own right.

L I L A C S W A N T E D - A V A I L A B L E

One of the prime assets of any plant Society is the readily available opportunity to exchange plants among its membership at a reasonable cost and thus make it possible for the participants to upgrade their individual collections with new and better selections.

You, as a member of ILS may use this publication to publish a list of lilac species and cultivars which you would like to have, or would like to dispose of.

Your complete address should accompany the WANTED or AVAILABLE listing of lilacs so that interested persons may get in touch with you and organize or plan direct exchange with the individual.

In view of the rather complex and cumbersome procedure involved in shipment out of the country (export - import permits and phytosanitary certificate, etc.,) it is advisable that U.S. members keep exchanges with members within the country while Canadian members do the same among their members.

Since most plants eventually find their way across the border via the complicated channels of legality, they likewise find their way into the commercial trade and become available to the interested grower down the road in a few years. Time and patience will one day satisfy all your lilac wants.

- Charles Holetich

WHAT IS ILS ALL ABOUT

- Mary C. Smith

During the two years since I assumed duties as editor of your Newsletter I have had the opportunity either to meet or communicate by letter with many interesting, knowledgeable and co-operative ILS members. With their help I am learning all the time and perhaps when it is time to step aside I will have learned some of the ropes.

Communication among all members is what the Newsletter is all about, as I see it. With our International membership it is our most effective communication tool and should, therefore, be used by everyone. We must be in touch with the officers, the Directors and all the rest of the members to be successful in achieving the purpose for which the Society was formed. Consequently, we need a wide range of subject material for our publication. For that information we depend on any members who have inquiries or anything they can share with us.

Through the Newsletter Regional Vice-Presidents can inform members in their own areas and in turn be available for inquiries. They can help by keeping tab on lilac plantings and sources of lilacs. Recently, I received another letter asking, "Where can I buy lilacs to be shipped or delivered?" The lady, from Hamden, Conn., says that since Havemeyer Garden closed she hasn't found a good place to buy named lilacs.

I am pleased to report that work is now under way to prepare a source list within the Society. Members are asked to send Walter Oakes a list of species and cultivars they have available. Such a list will be an aid to commercial firms wanting propagating material as well as an aid in answering the public's inquiries for lilac sources. This list will be published when it is compiled.

Also on the way is a list of recommended lilacs. Two lists are planned; one of the standard varieties that the average gardener would want and another of the species and new cultivars that are of interest to the collector and lilac fancier.

Work is also under way toward the publication of a LILAC MANUAL which will include planting and care information.

In the January 1984 Newsletter we will publish an index to cover the past four years since the last index came out in January 1979.

List of current area Vice-Presidents

1. Northeast - Mr. Thomas Chieppo, 10 Brightwood Rd., Woodbridge, CT 06525
2. Midatlantic - Mr. John Carvill, 138 Old Loudon Road, Latham, NY 12110
3. South - Mrs. Elsie Kara, 24540 Emmonds Rd., Columbia Station, Ohio 44028
4. Central - To be confirmed.
5. Midwest - Mr. Max Peterson, R.R.1, Box 273, Meadowlark Hill, Ogallala, NE 69153
6. Northwest - To be confirmed
7. Pacific - Dr. Louis C. Erickson, Botanic Gardens, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521
8. Southwest - To be confirmed.
9. Eastern Canada - Mr. George Kidd, R.R. #7, Nepean, Ontario K2H 7V2
10. Western Canada - To be confirmed
11. Members at large - To be confirmed.

A list of current Committee Chairmen will be carried in the next issue of LN

INEXPENSIVE PLANT LABELS

At the meeting in Madison, Walter Eickhorst was telling us about some plant labels that are easily and economically made. Here he shares this information with us.

A carbon ribbon typewriter is necessary - the old Underwood Five with the rag ribbon would not do the job. Type information on a suitably sized, self-gummed, plain white label (a common brand is AVERY). It may have to be trimmed to size to fit the white plastic label commonly used in the greenhouse business. I suggest that you trim the gummed label so that it DOES NOT EXTEND BEYOND THE EDGES OF THE PLASTIC LABEL. When you peel the label away from the waxed sheet DO NOT LET YOUR FINGERS TOUCH THE TACKY GLUE SURFACE because this destroys the gummed material and it just won't stick as it should.

Spray the finished labels lightly with three or four applications of the protective material commonly found in art supply stores - CRYLON is one of the oldest. This coating will seal out the moisture.

I won't guarantee this simple device but it won't cost much to try it. I picked up one of these from the base of a tree that I'd planted six or seven years earlier and it looked almost as good as the day it was put out in the tall grass and weeds.

INCREASE OF ILS DUES AS OF JANUARY, 1984

About our ILS dues .. The good news is that ILS continues to edit and send out monthly newsletters and to publish convention proceedings and other special reports, which include useful data otherwise not too accessible to many of us. Because of voluntary efforts of many in the society, it has done so without a due increase in at least five years. Meanwhile, postage, paper, and duplication have seen price leaps upward. Further good news is that the board members recognized that costs are more than the dues. Were it not for the dedicated efforts of so many, and for the generous contributions of the members and friends, and for auctions, donations, and proceeds, dues would need to be much higher. Please note the new schedule of dues for the 1984 year (due January, 1984). We hope support of the new due structure will be understandable and recognized as a realistic need to assure ILS its future.

Single annual	\$ 10.00
Family	12.50
Sustaining	20.00
Institutional/Commerical	25.00
Life	150.00

Sincerely,

HEARD GARDENS LTD

William R. Heard

For membership dues review
Committee

MAKE YOUR DOLLAR RUN A LITTLE FURTHER

Mailing of the reminder notices about unpaid membership dues is costly and time consuming.

You are in a position to help your Society save time and money by renewing your membership on your own initiative.

The address sticker reveals you membership expiry date, while inside cover of your monthly publication will help you select the desired membership category.

Members from U.S.A. and International (other than Canada) mail membership to: Walter W. Oakes, Box 315, Rumford, Maine, 04276.

Canadian members mail membership to Charles D. Holetich, c/o Royal Botanical Gardens, Box 399, Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3H8.

Make cheque payable to INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY.

It takes 3-6 weeks to process and update your membership.

Some membership classifications may appear on the address sticker in abbreviated form: (L=Life; H=Honorary; C=Complimentary; F=Family).

Charles Holetich.