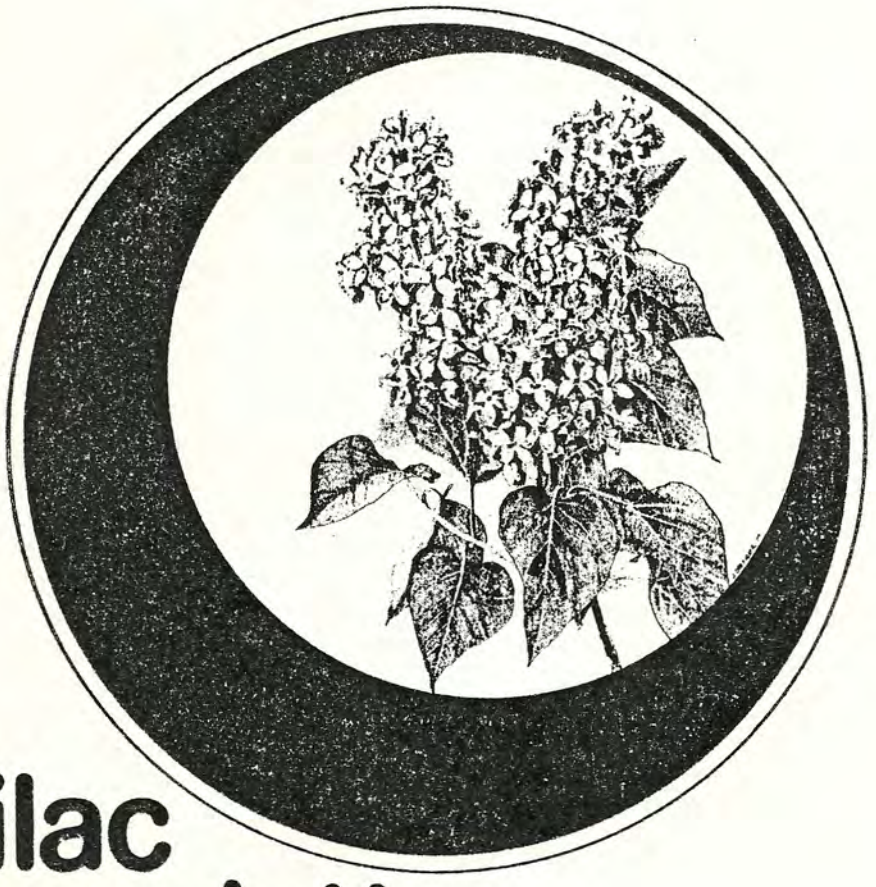

Lilac Newsletter

Vol. IV, No. 10, October, 1978

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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LILACS FOR EIGHT WEEKS OF BLOOM

By: Owen M. Rogers, Professor,
University of New Hampshire,
Durham, NH 03824

Pity the gardener who says, "Lilacs? Two weeks of beauty and that's it!" That person sees only the common lilac with its admitted beauty of flower, but ignores other lilacs which extend the bloom season. Eight weeks of "beauty" is not at all difficult to obtain.

The first lilac species to bloom is Syringa oblata. It will open a week to ten days ahead of the common lilac, S. vulgaris; in fact, the flowers are so early that occasionally a late freeze will nip some of the buds. The species also has some fall foliage color so that this lilac's "beauty" extends all the way to autumn. The species S. oblata itself may not be readily available in all nurseries, but cultivars that have been developed from the hybrid of S. oblata and S. vulgaris (called Syringa x hyacinthiflora) are carried by many firms. Such names as 'Blue Hyacinth' and 'Clarkes Giant' (both blue), 'Assessippi' (lilac) and 'Esther Staley' and 'Necker' (pink) are good additions to any lilac garden for their early bloom.

Following S. x hyacinthiflora, the bloom of the common lilac, S. vulgaris, dominates the season. This is the lilac of Lord Noyes who wanted everyone to "Go down to Kew in lilac time," and of Walt Whitman's, "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd." The profusion of bloom and fragrance of these fabled blossoms overshadows most things that bloom at that time. There are too many cultivars of the common lilac; over 1,000 have been recorded, so the best recommendation is to go to one of the great lilac collections with pencil and paper, note outstanding plants, and match those names against the lists of lilacs available from a favorit nursery. Even if your nursery has only a restricted list, chances are that at least some of them will fit your needs for beautiful bloom.

After the common lilac, and frequently overlapping it, there are several lilac species to provide continued bloom,

including Syringa x chinensis, S. microphylla, and S. persica. Syringa x chinensis, sometimes called the landscape lilac, is admired for its profuse bloom. It is smaller than the common lilac, and some consider it more graceful. In addition, it always blooms well -- something that cannot be claimed for every lilac. The Littleleaf Lilac, S. microphylla is even more graceful and dainty than the Chinese Lilac. The plant will grow wide, but not tall, so it fits easily into shrub border plans. S. microphylla 'Superba' is a pink form of the lavender colored species. Both are equally fragrant, and both will produce a few small flower clusters in August. This fall rebloom is not as spectacular as the spring flowering profusion, but in August, any lilac flower can be a showpiece, especially if it is also fragrant.

Syringa persica is the finest textured of all the lilacs because of its small finely divided leaves and many small flower clusters. The Persian lilac was described over 300 years ago in Persia; however, it probably originated in China long before it was carried to Persia and India.

After the group of species listed above have finished flowering, most people think the season is over; but, now is just the beginning for the group of larger leaved species typified by Syringa x prestoniae. These lilacs are good landscape plants, excellent for large screens and enclosures as well as for an abundance of large open flower clusters. They do require a site with reasonable moisture, because in drought and stress times they suffer from lack of water. There are an increasing number of good cultivar forms in this group as the plant breeders continue to improve the forms. 'James Macfarlane' and 'Coral' are noteworthy because they have deep rose, almost red buds and bright clear pink flowers. 'Royalty' is also an old favorite with deep purple flowers. This group of late lilacs includes several species and species hybrids that make fascinating garden subjects, but most are carried only by specialty nurseries. Sometimes cultivars such as 'Rutilant' (purple), 'Lutèce' (violet) and 'Hedin' (lt. pink) can be found through diligent search. New forms are being developed. One, which is not yet on the market, has been developed at the University of New Hampshire. This cultivar blooms in the New England area late in June, and when it is

available commercially, it will extend the bloom season of the Prestoniae hybrids and overlap them with the tree lilac -- the last species to bloom.

The main lilac bloom sequence ends with the tree lilac, Syringa reticulata, in late June and early July. Its compound panicles of creamy white flowers are very large, occasionally as much as 20 inches long and 12 inches across. The individual flowers are small, and without the characteristic lilac fragrance, although they do have a very rich, honey-like sweet smell. The tree lilac is, in fact, a small tree and an excellent landscape plant. It should be used a great deal more than it is, especially for its very conspicuous midsummer bloom.

There are a few lilacs that will put out an occasional small flower in the late summer. Even the common lilac still sometimes bloom in August, although it is unusual enough an event to warrant space in the local newspaper. If a lilac fancier would like such notoriety or just enjoys the fragrance of lilacs, more consistent early fall bloom can be obtained by planting Syringa meyeri and the one mentioned earlier in this article Syringa microphylla, either as the lavender colored species or the pink 'Superba' form.

Late in the fall, at least two lilac species produce effective fall foliage color. Syringa patula (S. velutina) turns a good burgundy while the hybrids of Syringa oblata also have fine purple-bronze tints.

Even the common lilac has fall value. Admittedly, it remains green until leaf drop, but because that leaf fall is very late (into November in New England), the contrast of green leaves with highly colored fall foliage plants highlights them both. When the leaves have finally dropped, lilac seed pods can extend the season of attractiveness. The tree lilac seed pods retain their clear straw yellow long into the winter and are especially effective in front of a dark background. Colored pods are known; one year I saw red seed pods on a plant of Syringa oblata. They must have resulted from an unusual combination of plant and weather, because the color has never reappeared with the same intensity. I am encouraged and

hopefully can enlist helpers, to look for more reliable performers. Maybe, somewhere out there, there is a lilac with seed pods that will rival the crabapple!

So, lilacs for two weeks? Nonsense, lilacs are for eight weeks. No! Lilacs are for all seasons.

Most Popular Cultivars of the Common Lilac Syringa vulgaris
(From a survey conducted by Mr. Frank Niedz in 1970)

COLOR	DOUBLE	SINGLE
White	'Miss Ellen Willmott'	'Vestale'
	'Edith Cavell'	'Jan van Tol'
	'Mme. Lemoine'	'Mont Blanc'
Violet	'Violetta'	'De Miribel'
	'Maréchal Lannes'	'Cavour'
Blue	'Ami Schott'	'President Lincoln'
	'Olivier de Serres'	'Firmament'
	'Président Grévy'	'Decaisne'
Lilac	'Victor Lemoine'	'Christophe Colomb'
	'Henri Martin'	'Jacques Callot'
	'Léon Gambetta'	
	'Alphonse Lavallée'	
Pink	'Mme. Antoine Buchner'	'Lucie Baltet'
	'Katherine Havemeyer'	'Macrostachya'
	'Montaigne'	
	'Belle de Nancy'	
Magenta	'Paul Thirion'	'Capitaine Baltet'
	'Charles Joly'	'Mme. F. Morel'
	'President Poincaré'	'Congo'
Purple	'Adelaide Dunbar'	'Andenken an Ludwig Späth'
	'Paul Hariot'	'Mrs. W.E. Marshall'
		'Night'
		'Monge'

NOTE: "Lilacs for Eight Weeks of Bloom" first appeared in American HORTICULTURIST, official publication of The American Horticultural Society in the April '78 issue, and is herewith acknowledged and reprinted with the express permission of that publication.

Editor

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THE PRESTON LILACS

By: Donald Wyman, Horticulturist (retired)
Arnold Arboretum

PRESTON LILACS are important because they are extremely hardy and lengthen the lilac blooming season by about two weeks. At Boston they bloom from early June to mid-June, whereas the common lilacs start to bloom about May 20. In 1925, Miss Isabella Preston, then horticulturist at the government experimental station at Ottawa, Ont., Canada, made the cross that produced these lilacs.

Of course, Syringa vulgaris, the common lilac, is hardy in zone 3 (Arnold Arboretum hardiness zone map), but S. villosa is hardy in zone 2, while Syringa reflexa is hardy even in Finland, where excellent specimens are grown in the parks at Helsinki and farther north. Miss Preston made several crosses, but one of the most successful was S. villosa x S. reflexa, which resulted in many lilac clones. This same cross subsequently has been made by others, notably F.L. Skinner, Dropmore, Manitoba.

From Miss Preston's original cross, many hybrid clones originated that start to flower two weeks after S. vulgaris finishes. The Arnold Arboretum obtained over 40 of these clones for trial, grew them side by side for years and compared them; the resulting information was used in making this report. It is of note that only 11 of the true S. x Prestoniae clones are herein recommended, along with a few other late-blooming lilacs that seem worthy of inclusion.

Authorities at the government station at Ottawa were so enthused about the new plants that they named many of the original seedlings in the row by the simple expedient of allotting the name of one of Shakespeare's heroines to each plant. This has caused some confusion, for many varieties that turned out to be practically identical were introduced separately to the nursery trade at one time or another, when enthusiasm was high about them.

All told, about 80 clones of the S. villosa x S. reflexa cross were named, and the names were published. At least 22 of these were recommended to be dropped by the Ottawa experimental station, years after they first were named. Miss Preston, as well as others, began to realize how similar some of the clones were and how inadvisable it was to try to keep them all actively growing in cultivation.

Judged by their performance in the Arnold Arboretum many others could well be dropped from commercial propagation and removed from display collections. However, the 11 recommended varieties are outstanding and certainly represent the group well. Many of these have been studied as they bloom together in the Arnold Arboretum, where they are grown in the same soil and climatic conditions. These studies were started several years ago and were under way for a period of at least six years. Since that time, nothing has occurred in their performances that would change the rating of the older forms.

A few new varieties aside from Miss Preston's original group, have reached the industry, and these are included in the report, although information about them has become available only since the first study was made. In the accompanying list, all varieties belong to S. x Prestoniae, unless otherwise indicated. The few other species and hybrids should be compared with the Preston lilacs.

Color Groups

The colors of most S. x Prestoniae varieties do not widely differ. It is an accepted fact that with lilacs as well as with many other plants, the amount of sunshine affects the color of the blooms. Also, under some circumstances the amounts of water

and nutrients the plants receive may be responsible for slight changes in degree or depth of color in the flowers from one year to the next.

When compared with the Royal Horticultural Society's Chart, the blooms range only from rhodamine pink to imperial purple (or in more general terms, violet reds and reddish violets). If the new American Horticultural Society's color fan is used as a reference, they range mostly in the purplish pink. Many of the varieties have pronounced colors only in the flower buds; as the flowers open, they fade to white. Of course those that keep their color longer are proving the most popular. There is nothing quite like a row of 'Nerissa', 'Donald Wyman' or 'Guinevere' when they are in full bloom during the early part of June.

To make selection of the better clones easier, the list is divided into four color groups, the color of the flowers in each group being similar or even identical. The flower clusters of most varieties are pyramidal; many are rather large and open, but some are rather dense. Only a very few show the narrow type clusters of S. reflexa. (One plant in the Arnold Arboretum, Syringa x swegiflexa, which we received from Hesse Nurseries of Germany some years ago, is beautiful in this respect, showing slightly nodding clusters). For some reason or other, the nodding lilac has not proved an outstanding ornamental plant in our collection, but as noted before, the species has proved one of the most ornamental of all the lilacs in Finland and Sweden.

As in most plants, sizes of the flower clusters vary from year to year; they also vary on individual plants. Several measurements were made of flower clusters of the varieties listed, during several years, but the measurements given can be considered only approximate. The density of the flower cluster is a clonal characteristic, fairly constant from year to year. All varieties grow vigorously and certainly are very hardy (zone 2).

Varieties marked with an asterisk (*) have proved the best from an ornamental viewpoint at the Arnold Arboretum. It is of interest to note that all those so marked are available in commercial nurseries in this country.

Late-blooming lilac hybrids have appeared mostly during the last 40 years and are interesting, vigorous and hardy. This resume of those tried in the Arnold Arboretum should be used as a suggested list of varieties that might be continued in cultivation for ornamental purposes (those starred) and of those that might be discarded as not outstanding.

Group 1

FLOWER BUDS -- Rhodamine pink (527/1 to 527-2)

FLOWERS -- Rhodamine pink (527-2 to whitish in most vars.)

	FLOWER CLUSTERS (inches)			
NAME	WIDTH	HEIGHT	DENSITY	REMARKS
'Bellicent'	5	6	open	S. x josiflexa var.
*'Coral'	8	8	open	
*'Dawn'	5	9	open to dense	
'Elinor'	4	6	dense	
*'Hecla'	7	8	open to dense	
*'Hiawatha'	4	6	dense	
*'Lynette'	4	6	dense	S. x josiflexa var. flowers do not fade white
pinetorum	2	3 1/2	open	
*'Romeo'	8	9	open	flowers do not fade white
*x swegiflexa	2 1/2	6	open	Arnold Arboretum #701-36
Sweginzowii	3 1/2	5	open	
tomentella	4	6	open	

NOTE: The reason for recommending seven varieties in this group is that this delightful pink color is prominent in only a very few lilacs.

Group 2

FLOWER BUDS -- Fuchsia purple (28/2) to magenta purple (030/2)

FLOWERS -- Whitish when open, but much color still on corolla tubes.

NAME	FLOWER CLUSTERS (inches) WIDTH	HEIGHT	DENSITY	REMARKS
'Anna Amhoff'	5	6	open	S. x josiflexa var.
'Audrey'	5	9	dense	
'Caliban'	5	6	open	
'Carlton'	9	9	open	S. x swegiflexa var.
'Desdemona'	6	6	open	
'Dorcas'	8	12	open	
'Handel'	5	8	dense	
'Hedin'	4	7	open	(S. villosa x S. sweginzowii)
x henryi	4	6	open to dense	
*'Isabella'	8	11	dense	this is the type - one of the best of all.
'Katherina'	4	7	open	
'Miranda'	5	10	open	
'Octavia'	4	6	dense	
'Paulina'	6	5	open	
'Portia'	8	11	dense	
*'Prairial'	6	8	dense	(S. henryi x S. tomentella)
'Silvia'	6	10	open	

Group 2

'Titania'	6	9	open
*'Ursula'	7	10	dense
'Valeria'	5	9	dense
'W.T. Macoun'	5	8	dense

Group 3

FLOWER BUDS -- Cyclamen purple (30/2) to magnolia purple (030/2)

FLOWERS -- Cyclamen purple (30/3) to magnolia purple (030/3)
Flowers in most varieties of this group do not fade white but keep their general color.

NAME	FLOWER CLUSTERS (inches) WIDTH	HEIGHT	DENSITY	REMARKS
*'Donald Wyman'	5	8	dense	
*'Enid'	7	10	open to dense	S. x josiflexa var.
'Francisca'	6	8	dense	flowers fade whitish
*'Guinevere'	8	9	open	S. x josiflexa var.
'Jessica'	5	7	open	
*'Nerissa'	8	10	dense	
'Olivia'	8	11	open	flowers fade whitish
'Rutilant'	9	10	open	S. x nanceiana var.
Wolfii	3 1/2	7	dense	

Group 4

FLOWER BUDS -- Petunia purple (32/2) to phlox purple (632/2)

FLOWERS -- Petunia purple (32/3) to whitish

NAME	FLOWER CLUSTERS (inches) WIDTH	HEIGHT	DENSITY	REMARKS
'Ariel'	7	9	dense	
'Charles Hepburn'	4	6	open	S. villosa var.
'Charmian'	6	8	open	S. villosa var.
*'Excellens'	4	6	open	S. patula var. starred for pure white flowers
*'Floréal'	6	8	dense	S. x nanceiana var. later in bloom than most varieties and starred for this reason.
Josikaea	3 1/2	5	dense	
Josikaea 'H. Zabel'	2	4	open	
julianae	5	7	open	
*'Lutèce'	4 1/2	8	open	S. x henryi var.
'Nocturne'	4 1/2	7	dense	
'Sulte'	4 1/2	8	dense	S. x chinensis var.
'Swanee'	3	5	dense	
*villosa	6	7	dense	some plants with pure white flowers

Group 5

FLOWER BUDS -- Imperial purple (33/2)

FLOWERS -- Imperial purple (33/3)

NAME	FLOWER CLUSTERS (inches) WIDTH	HEIGHT	DENSITY	REMARKS
'James Macfarlane'	6	8	dense	Much more deep pink than purple
'Maybelle Farnum'	6	9	dense	
'Nellie Bean'	6	8	dense	
*'Royalty'	4	9	dense	S. x josiflexa var.

NOTE: Photographs which accompanied this article in the original text have been omitted. Nomenclature has been edited in accordance with the Tentative INTERNATIONAL REGISTER of CULTIVAR NAMES in the Genus SYRINGA.

Acknowledgment: This article is herein reprinted with the express permission of the AMERICAN NURSERYMAN magazine where it first appeared in the December 1, 1970 issue, as well as that of the author.

Editor

* * *

from the ... ...Registrar's Desk

INFORMATION WANTED on the following lilac cultivars:

Syringa vulgaris 'Peterson's'

Scions of S. v. 'Peterson's' were obtained by the Morton Arboretum in 1936 from the Rochester Parks Dept., plants were grown until 1954, but neither flower type (S or D) nor colour were recorded.
The Dept. of Parks at Rochester has one plant in Highland Park; the source of the plant is unknown, it was acquired prior to 1973; neither flower type nor colour have been recorded.
Would anyone having additional information on 'Peterson's' please write to the Registrar.

S. v. 'Amoena'

The plant seen by McKelvey (1928; p. 257) at the Arnold Arboretum was single; Wister (1927; p. 8) describes it as Single, Blue, but changes (Wister 1942; p. 43) it to S V (= pinkish) and later (Wister 1953; p. 24) to D VI (= magenta); D VI was also the descriptive code given by Rogers (1976; p. 4). 'Amoena' has been in cultivation at one time or another at the Arnold Arboretum, Elan Memorial Park, Morton Arboretum, Rochester Parks and Whitnall Park Arboretum.
Would anyone having information on the flower type (S or D) of 'Amoena' please write to the Registrar.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

You might like to inform your readers that J.G.'s initials belong to one Jacob (Jake) Gerling, one-time foreman of Durand-Eastman Park, Rochester, New York under the late "Barney" Slavin. Over the years Jake contributed many cover articles to the American Nurseryman magazine about plants growing in the Rochester parks. Thank you, Walter, for bringing to remembrance many pleasant visits to Rochester in the "good old days" to see the wonderful trees and shrubs at Durand-Eastman and Highland parks, and the enthusiastic reception by one of America's unsung plantsmen. Jake lives at 24 Bryan Street, Rochester with his good wife Margaret, grandparents several times over.

(s) Robert B. Clark

Ed. Note:

See SYRINGA PEKINENSIS, Aug. 1978