



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.

This publication, *LILAC NEWSLETTER* (formerly *THE PIPELINE*) is issued monthly. Back copies are available by writing to the International Lilac Society, c/o Mr. Charles Holetich, Royal Botanical Gardens, Box 399, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8N 3H8. Please send 50 cents for each copy requested.

President: Robert B. Clark
Cattle Landing Road, R.D. No. 1, Box 288, Meredith, NH 03253

Secretary: Walter W. Oakes*
Box 315, Rumford, Maine, 04276

Treasurer: Mrs. Marie Chaykowski
4041 Winchell Road, Mantua, Ohio, 44255

Editor: Walter E. Eickhorst
129 West Franklin St., Naperville, Illinois. 60540

INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY,
William A. Utley, Ex. Vice-Pres.,
Grape Hill Farm, Devereaux Rd., Clyde, NY 14433.

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LILACS: RECURRING SYMBOL OF SPRING

- Don Wedge, WEDGE NURSERY
Albert Lea, Minnesota

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever returning spring.

- Walt Whitman

For the great American poet, and for Americans across the land, the lilac is the symbol of spring. Its recurring perfume and delicately colored blossoms signal the arrival of spring, and evoke all the sweet-sad thoughts of that season. The lilac, Thoreau pointed out long ago, will outlive the person who plants it, and will outlive the house near which it is planted.

The common lilac, Syringa vulgaris, and its cultivars, are the best known shrubs in the northern half of the United States. They succeed in all but the warmest sections of this continent, and grow particularly well in the colder areas.

CULTURE

Lilacs will stand considerable abuse; they will tolerate acid soil, and will survive shade, bad soil, and drought. But for best results, including production of the best flowers, they require full sun, fertile and well drained soil, and either neutral or slightly alkaline soil. It is desirable to give lilacs an annual dressing of bone meal, about one-half pound lightly forked into the soil within a radius of one yard around each plant. Mulch with compost or manure and apply a complete fertilizer yearly.

Prune to keep the plants shapely, to keep them within bounds, and to encourage the young growth for future years bloom. Six to twelve good stems are preferred, keeping the plant open enough to allow sunlight to reach the interior stems. Immediately after flowering, old blooms should be cut off above a pair of buds. High pruning usually causes tall leggy top growth on plants that remain bare at the base. Some selections sucker more than others; many

only put out enough suckers for natural replacement. The strongest new sucker canes should be left to serve as replacement shoots. Weak suckers, and an over abundance of those moving out into new soil should be cut off with a sharp spade.

Cutting back dormant bareroot plants at setting out time will result in better plants several seasons later.

A balled and burlaped lilac can be planted with very little setback. A.M. Brand, one of Minnesota's notable nurserymen who devoted many years to developing lilacs, always recommended planting lilacs with the crown six inches below the surface, rather than the two inches recommended for most shrubs.

The lilac needs time to become fully established and must not be expected to produce flowers of normal size and color for at least two or three years after transplanting. During the first year, it is important to remove all flower clusters before they open; in the second year, allow only one or two flower clusters to bloom. In subsequent years, faded flowers should be removed.

The Wedge Nursery has grown hybrid lilacs since 1902. Beginning in 1935, we decided to specialize in hybrid lilacs. For the past 12 years we have grafted 120,000 to 150,000 lilacs per year, growing mainly for other nurseries.

There are more than 2,000 cultivars of lilacs, and selecting the best of these is always difficult. The characteristics we look for are: (1) Regularity and abundance of bloom, and time of bloom (longer season); (2) Flowers that are held upright and displayed, not hidden by foliage; (3) Large panicle and floret size, delightful fragrance, clean foliage resistant to powdery mildew, and foliage texture; (4) The size and shape of the shrub.

We are growing some 60 hybrids, 38 of the 40 top "A" rated selections in the 1953 list of "The 100 Best Lilacs for America", and 17 of the 39 "B" rated cultivars, plus four or five introductions we believe are on their way up. Those selections which should be considered for planting are:

WHITE: 'Miss Ellen Willmot', 'Edith Cavell', 'Mme. Lemoine'.

VIOLET: 'De Miribel', 'Maréchal Lannes'.

BLUE: 'Olivier de Serres', 'Firmament', 'President Lincoln'.

LILAC: 'Jacques Callot', 'Michel Buchner'.

PINK: 'Mme. Antoine Buchner', 'Katherine Havemeyer',
'Montaigne', 'Macrostachya'.

MAGENTA (red): 'Paul Thirion', 'Charles Joly', 'Capitaine
Baltet', 'Réaumur', 'Congo'.

PURPLE: 'Paul Hariot', 'Andenken an Ludwig Späth', 'Mrs.
W.E. Marshall', 'Monge', 'Paul Deschanel'.

Assigning cultivars to certain color groups may be questioned. No two persons ever seem to agree on the exact color of a lilac. Flower color changes in different places, soils, climates and seasons, and from hour to hour, as the flower opens, and day to day as it fades.

Note that I have not designated any variety as single or double florets. Most people, if asked, would no doubt say that they would prefer a double, yet they would not be able to detect the difference unless they viewed the panicles from three feet or less. If the choice were made between two lilacs in bloom, being double or single would have little bearing on the decision. There are more outstanding single floret lilacs than double floret lilac forms.

The following summary of outstanding selections is based on observing the plants in our display area for a period of eight years.

'Mme. Antoine Buchner'. Loaded with large blooms every year, the buds are intense pink as they open. This pink extends fully halfway over the outer portions of the petals, and gradually fades to delicate pink and then to a pure white center. The panicles are large and open.

'De Miribel'. Good to immense amount of bloom annually. Excellent full shrub and foliage. Panicles are rather slender, long, compact, and upright. Darkest of all our cultivars (deep violet), heavily scented, and retains the deep coloring (non-fading).

'Andenken an Ludwig Späth'. Profuse bloomer almost yearly. Deep purple (dark reddish purple). Medium open branched. Covered with medium size erect blooms.

'Mrs. W.E. Marshall'. Excellent shrub and foliage loaded with medium to small size blooms almost every year. Very dark red purple bloom.

'Monge'. Full, compact shrub loaded with blooms each year. Panicle, very broad at base and large, opens to a brilliant deep rich red, later taking on a purple cast. Panicles usually almost completely cover the foliage at the top of the plant.

'Macrostachya'. Medium size full plant covered every year with rather slender medium size panicles held upright. Pink buds open to a clear delicate pink and fade to almost white.

'Montaigne'. Every year, average to heavily laden amount of large compact blooms on tall, open, upright plants. Soft rose-pink blooms.

'Paul Deschanel'. Sweetly scented, long loose panicles, dark red in bud and opening up to red and fading to pink. Fair to good amount of flowers most years.

'Réaumur'. Good to heavily laden with small flowers annually. Shrub is short and full, with dark green leaves. Purple red to rose-red effect.

'Paul Hariot'. Deep purple red, medium compact bloom. Medium to good blooming each year.

'Jacques Callot'. Medium to good amount of medium size lavender pink blooms yearly. Medium full plant.

'Michel Buchner'. Good amount of medium size, pink to lilac blooms each year. Medium full plant.

I remember spending one winter afternoon back in the 1940s discussing lilac cultivars with Mr. A.M. Brand of Faribault, Minnesota who originated many peony and lilac hybrids - I still have the notes I took that day. This is one statement he made; "'Maréchal Foch' is one of the greatest lilacs, along with 'Léon Gambetta'".

Mr. Clyde Heard from Iowa, recognized as a noted authority on lilacs came up with his choice seven: 'Anabel' (pink), 'Capitaine Baltet' (reddish pink), 'Charm' (lavender pink), 'Edith Cavell' (white), 'Edmond Boissier' (purple), 'Glory' (reddish lavender), and 'Lucie Baltet' (pink).

NOTE: This article first appeared in the MINNESOTA HORTICULTURIST (April 1977) and is herein reprinted by permission of both the author and the Minnesota State Horticultural Society.

Editor

LILACS AT KEW!

For just a bit of nostalgia, a laugh or two and lilacs, see an article under the title of "Pilgrimage To Kew" (condensed from New York Times) in the Feb. '78 issue of READERS DIGEST (p. 62). I don't know the poem "The Barrel-Organ", but for those of you who remember, perhaps the complete story (as it appeared in N.Y.T.) by H.S. Valentine, Jr. would recall many pleasant memories.

Editor

LANDSCAPE LILACS

- Robert B. Clark
Meredith, New Hampshire

Lilac lovers, and sometimes even expert plantsmen, often overlook the six or more species of little-leaved lilacs all of which have valuable attributes for the cultivated landscape: profusion of lilac or pinkish flowers, sweetly scented; usually small shrubs (or which can easily be kept so); slender upright or arching branches clothed with fine-textured foliage. Some species rebloom in the autumn. Nearly all are adapted to gardens in the northeastern states and eastern Canada, some even are suitable for planting in the south and southwest. Perhaps one reason these choice lilacs are less well known than the familiar "French hybrids", the early and the late hybrids, is that they are rather hard to distinguish one from another.

Little-leaved lilacs botanically are true lilacs. They are recognized from common lilacs, the so-called "French hybrids" and the early hybrids, by their smaller flowers and their leaves which are more or less hairy, thus accounting for their botanical name, Pubescentes or pubescent lilacs. From the late or Ottawa hybrids they are easily told by their much smaller leaves, and by their flowers which are borne laterally in usually delicate clusters, and of course by their decided fragrance. The little-leaved lilacs bloom during midseason, that is, when the common lilacs are blooming from mid to late May, depending upon latitude and season. All of them come originally from China or Korea; all are hardy. Very little hybridizing has been done successfully among these landscape lilacs. Most of them are available in nurseries, if you are willing to search them out.

The name-bearing lilac of the group, S. pubescens, was introduced into cultivation by Dr. Emil Bretschneider, medical attaché of the Russian legation to Peking, who sent seeds to four western botanical gardens: St. Petersburg, Paris, London and Boston, 1879-1882. The seedlings at the Arnold Arboretum reached maturity in 1887, and received triple superlatives from Professor Sargent: "most distinct and most floriferous of all

lilacs". Yet today the clove lilac, so-called by the Chinese for the resemblance of its expanding flower buds to that of the spice, is not offered by any nurseryman. Why? It appears that in the northern states this lilac blooms so early that its flower buds frequently are caught by late frosts. At Glen Head on Long Island Sound and in New Jersey, presumably in the lee of the Watchung Mountains, Mrs. McKelvey reports that this species sets seeds. She also reports that in forty-five years the Bretschneider seedling at the Arnold Arboretum attained a height of 12 feet with slender branches producing a well-filled handsome shrub which flowers from mid-May to early June, both dependably and profusely. The delicate pale pinkish flowers are not showy however. She goes on to say, "I have frequently seen persons unmindful of the inconspicuous beauty of its flowers halted by its pungent fragrance -- distinct from that of any other lilac."

The rest of the little-leaved lilacs were introduced during the first decade of the present century -- almost. Our next species hails from Korea and the Dagelet Island in the Japanese Sea. The Korean lilac, S. velutina, the name by which this species is known in the trade but which we now must call S. patula because this latter name was used first for this species (in the same volume of the botanical journal incidentally) even though the author believed it to be a privet (sounds confusing, doesn't it), is a broad-spreading shrub, six to twelve feet tall, with slender erect branches. Its hairy, papery, ovate leaves are pale and densely velvety beneath. The flower clusters are loose. The florets, lilac or whitish, are of an exceedingly pleasant fragrance. In nature the Korean lilac grows on rocky slopes and mountain gravels. A more compact or slower growing or possibly a "dwarf" form is 'Miss Kim' discovered by Professor E.M. Meader while he was in service during the Korean "war" (see his account in The Pipeline, March 1976). Another "dwarf" Korean lilac is S. palibiniana (not distinguished botanically from the species, nevertheless distinct in gardens for its slender upright branches well furnished in season with small clusters of lilac-coloured flowers). All forms are readily available in nurseries.

Our third species, S. Potanini, inhabits streambank thickets of western China of Kansu, Szechuan and Yunnan provinces between

latitudes of 27-37⁰N where it was discovered by G.A. Potanin in 1885. It is a gangling shrub to 12 feet in height with rather loose flower clusters of shell pink, fragrant flowers. The small, broadly elliptic leaves are conspicuously silvery beneath. Potanin's lilac is rarely seen in gardens and also is scarce in nurseries.

Julia's lilac, S. Julianae, named for the wife of the botanist who described it, Mrs. C.K. Schneider, was collected by E.H. Wilson in northwestern Hupeh in 1901. It is an hemispherical shrub to 10 feet in height whose leaves are velvety to the touch. It blooms in profusion in early June with up to four pairs of thyrses to a branch, but its pale lilac-purple flowers are not, according to Mrs. McKelvey, very pleasingly fragrant. The florets not unusually are radially doubled with five to six lobes. Joseph Hers, a Belgian engineer-plant collector, sent seed to Europe and America. Upton Nursery late of Detroit distributed a form called 'Hers Variety' which appears to have darker flowers. Upper Bank Nurseries of Media, Pennsylvania, seems to be the only nursery offering it today.

Syringa microphylla, whose botanical designation gives the common name to the group, is a widely occurring species in northern and central China. It was discovered by the Reverend Guiseppi Giraldi in the 1890s, and described by Professor Ludwig Diels in 1901. It is a small shrub, five feet or more in height with slender, arching branches. The flower clusters are the smallest of the group but are so numerous that the branches are said to droop under their weight. The pale flowers, too, are small but very sweetly scented, and in cool, moist seasons continue to bloom into the autumn. The form 'Superba', often and confusingly called "daphne" lilacs, is perhaps more widely grown than the species. It has been used by the late F.L. Skinner of Dropmore, Manitoba, with S. oblata var. dilatata to produce the rose-pink 'Maidens Blush' (available from Skinner Nursery, Roblin, Manitoba. ROL 1P0).

The Meyer lilac is known only in cultivation in China: near Peking and at Chengchou in northern Honan province, having been collected first by Frank N. Meyer of the U.S.D.A. in 1908, later by Joseph Hers in 1920. The U.S. Department of Agriculture

distributed two lots of seeds or seedlings from which American plants are derived. There is some variation noted among these plants, however the plants are compact, even slow-growing, up to five feet in height, with upright branches forming a flat-topped shrub. S. Meyeri bears small, elliptic-ovate leaves with two pairs of veins paralleling the margin. Its remontant flowering habit detracts from its springtime beauty owing to the truncated flower clusters. G. Morel (Pépinières Minier, 74, rue Volney, 49000 Angers, France) in 1962 introduced the double hybrid 'Josée' from the Meyer lilac crossed with the hybrid of S. velutina x microphylla.

Three other little-leaved lilacs have been found in remote Yunnan province more recently: SS. pinetorum, rugulosa and wardii. Only the first is available fifty years afterwards - from Hillier and Sons, Winchester, England.

LILACS WANTED:

In an attempt to bring together the several cultivar introductions of the late Edward J. Gardner an effort is being made to locate a source of plants or a small quantity of propagating material of the following items.

'C.J. Gardner	'Mrs. Robert M. Gardner'
'Lawrence Wheeler'	'Polly Stone'
'Mary Ann Gardner'	'White Sands'

The other three selections which this breeder is known to have introduced ('Edward J. Gardner', 'Jessie Gardner' and 'Leone Gardner') are already well established.

If you can provide information relative to this search please contact: Freek Vrugtman, Curator of Collections, ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS, Box 399, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. L8N 3H8.

CORRECTION: -

Vol. IV, No. 3 (March 1978). - Page 1 (THE LILAC - BEST LOVED "BLIZZARD BELD" SHRUB - Mabel L. Franklin.... Paragraph 1, line 5 should read: This happened one spring, many years ago, to my father's plantings. In Bismarck, North Dakota I discovered how much the people love their lilacs when I heard many of them saying that they hoped the late frost would not nip the lilac bloom. In more recent years etc. etc....

Editor: We are indeed sorry for this omission which apparently occurred in the printing of 1966, June issue of the MINNESOTA HORTICULTURIST.

OBSERVATIONS - LILACS OF NOTICE

Several miles of lilacs make up the roadside planting along Hwy. #10 between Fargo and Bismarck, N.D. - only a few of the plants in that rather extensive planting appear to be somewhat neglected.

A lilac hedge, clipped formal (although rather large) to a width of 6 to 10 ft. and a height of approximately 20 ft. can be seen at St. John's Abbey of the Benedictines in Collegeville, Minn.. This work of art provides a formidable barrier between the Abbey church and other college buildings.

Compliments: Mabel L. Franklin