



# Lilac Newsletter

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INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

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*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.

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CONTEMPORARY MAINLINE LILACS

by: Robert B. Clark, Meredith, New Hampshire

Fr. Guiseppi Giral-di, an Italian missionary to China, sent seeds of the wild form of the broad-leaved lilac, Syringa oblata var. giraldi to Europe in the 1890's. This variety occurs in three, possibly four, provinces: Sheesi, Shansi, Kansu, and maybe Hupeh, all of which suggests where the species, known only in cultivation, could have originated. Giral-di's variety, however, is more open and taller in habit than the species. Its leaves are more gradually tapering at the tip and truncate or very broadly wedge-shaped at the base. The flower clusters are larger and looser with flowers slightly darker - violet, marked white at the throat. The flower buds seen from above are markedly quadrangular.

So early flowering is the broad-leaved lilac that it seldom sets seed. Mons. Bellair at Versailles reported in 1909, after observing its flowering habit for five years, that it was the late expanding flowers toward the tip of the cluster which produced seed, concluding that the broad-leaved lilac, especially its variety, is not self-pollinating, but is fertilized by some later blooming lilac as the last florets expand and become receptive. Two years after Bellair's report Emile Lemoine, the son of Victor Lemoine et Fils, offered 'Lamartine', the product of var. giraldi crossed with one of his father's improved S. vulgaris cultivars. This race is characterized by a robust habit of growth, by its early bloom, and larger flower clusters of deeper colours ranging from violet to pink. Some forty or more cultivars of these so-called early hybrids, mostly produced by Emile Lemoine and by Walter B. Clarke of San Jose, California, are available.

Ten years after Lemoine introduced his Giral-di strain of early hybrid lilacs, Dr. F.L. Skinner of Dropmore, Manitoba, crossed a then novel Korean variety of the broad-leaved lilac, var. dilatata, with S. vulgaris, "both ways". More than 80 seedlings were raised, and by 1927 had reached maturity. In due course Skinner offered 'Assessippi', the first of a dozen



cultivars of the Korean strain of early hybrid lilacs. The var. dilatata is a smaller plant than the species. It branches low and is more spreading than upright in habit, producing a more graceful shrub. Its delicately fragrant flowers of palest lilac begin to bloom when the plant is only two feet tall. Doubly qualified, Mrs. McKelvey states, "at its best, this (Korean variety) is to me one of the most beautiful of all lilacs, although every specimen is not of equal decorative value".

Dr. Walter E. Lammerts of Freedom, California, has supplied the following information about his attempts to raise lilacs adapted to the warm winter Mediterranean climate of California. "While at Descanso Gardens at La Canada, California", Dr. Lammerts writes, "I grew seedlings from W.B. Clarke's C112, which was evidently an S. oblata hybrid, and intercrossed these. The seedlings were grown at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1943. In 1950 the best lavender one was selected and in 1952 was patented and introduced as 'Lavender Lady' by the Hines Nursery of Santa Ana. 'Sierra Snow' resulted from intercrossing 'Lamartine' with a selected white seedling and was introduced in 1967. The cultivars 'Old Lace', 'Sweet Charity', 'Big Blue' and 'Heather Haze' were selected from other populations, patented and introduced in 1975".

Since the next three crosses involve a distinctive Chinese Lilac of the section Vulgares, I shall give a brief description of it. This is the pinnate-leaved lilac, S. pinnatifolia, from Szechuan province where in thickets it grows up to ten or twelve feet tall, and is rare. Its most distinctive character is its pinnate leaves which are divided into 4-6 pairs of leaflets  $3/4$  to 3 inches long. The flower clusters are nodding 1 to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, hidden by the foliage, and the flowers are small, yellowish or creamy white. Also, it is very early blooming. The first hybrid is with S. laciniata, the cut-leaved "Persian" lilac. Two plants are in Highland Park at Rochester. These were obtained from Upton Nursery, and are about eye height and broad-spreading. They are exceedingly graceful with slender upright branches covered in season

with lavender flowers. This cross has not received a colloquial name, but in a year or two it will become available to I.L.S. members through our Propagation and Distribution Committee.

A second hybrid involving the pinnate-leaved lilac was grown in the Arnold Arboretum by William Judd, the propagator for many years before Al Fordham's time. Its other parent is S. oblata var. giraldi, also an early blooming lilac. Its name is S. x diversifolia, and two cultivars have been introduced: 'Nouveau' by Upton Nursery, and 'William H. Judd' by the Skinner Nursery.

Dr. Skinner also introduced the third hybrid involving the pinnate-leaved lilac, this a triple hybrid because the other parent was also a hybrid between S. oblata var. dilatata and a common lilac cultivar. Dr. Skinner calls it S. x heterophylla, but does not designate a fancy name for the best seedling.

Yet another Skinner introduction is the lilac-coloured 'Grace Mackenzie' between S. oblata var. dilatata and S. persica 'Alba'. I have not seen any of these Skinner hybrids, however I have seen one last hybrid between S. microphylla 'Superba' and the common lilac: 'Maidens Blush', a clear pink which I believe will soon find a prominent place in American Gardens.



BOOK REVIEW

Lilac Study by Joseph Dvorak, Jr., edited by Fr. John L. Fiala,  
84-pages, illustrated, indexed, xerographic  
reproduction, plastic cover, octavo.  
International Lilac Society, 1978.

The floral features of about 150 lilac cultivars, including 13 species and four hybrids, were noted and compared by Joseph Dvorak, Jr., in the collections of the Morton Arboretum at Lisle and Lilacia Park at Lombard, Illinois, in the 1950's. Fifty-one floral patterns, displayed on the covers, indicate the exceedingly varied structure of lilac flowers. I do not know of any comparable study in lilacs. It delineates the diversity in the lilac perianth and provides the lilac breeder with guidelines of possible genetic expression.

The lilac lover and the dispassionate investigator see eye to eye when they gaze upon the lilac's "flower" -- which the latter persists in calling the perianth since it envelopes the anthers. Basically the corolla, another technical collective term for this floral cycle, consists of four petals fused at their bases into a funnelform tube surmounted by four lobes which, when fully unfolded and seen from above, form a square. Old-fashioned lilac flowers still do, but for the past century lilac breeders, beginning with Victor Lemoine of Nancy, have tinkered with the "common" lilac to such an extent that teratological (abnormal) variations nowadays would seem to be the rule. Not only are the petals larger and variously shaded, but they are frequently "doubled", which is to say, increased in number to eight or more. Moreover this doubling assumes different patterns. The commonest expression consists of the transformation of the interior cycle, the stamens, into staminoidal petals. Such was the instance with the cv. 'Azure Plena' which Lemoine used in breeding his gorgeous "French hybrids".

But multiplication of certain parts comes at the expense of certain other parts, either structurally or functionally.



The Lemoines were successful in the 1870's in making a breakthrough from the simple lilac pattern to double lilacs. The present "study" reveals this development, provided the reader is willing to dig out the information. Among 116 Syringa vulgaris cultivars are presented 67 Lemoine lilacs.

Dvorak noted as "odd" Lemoine's 'Renoncule', introduced in 1881, with florets measuring 1/2 in. across and having 1-2 corollas. By 1886 the ever-popular 'President Grevy' appeared with the florets increased to 5/8 ins. across. The "very beautiful" 'Emile Lemoine' with considerable streaking and shading of rose on buds and young florets was released in 1889; it had three corollas and measured 3/4 ins. in diameter. Two years later came 'Belle de Nancy', measuring 7/8 ins. across, but with only two corollas. I come now to 1907 when Emile Lemoine's cultivars were being introduced: 'Montaigne', "extra beautiful, late", with 2-3 corollas and florets 5/8 ins. across, and 'Leon Gambetta' bearing 3/4 in. florets in 3-4 corollas in dense clusters. I shall skip the introduction of 1910 since we are considering hose-in-hose doubling. The remaining half-dozen cultivars appeared from 1916 to 1933, all "beautiful" or "extra beautiful", three with florets up to one inch in diameter, each doubled except 'Massena': 'Violetta', 'Katherine Havemeyer', 'Massena', 'Captain Perrault', 'Champlain' and 'Ami Schott'.

The apparently single-flowered 'Tombouctou', released in 1910, is denoted by Dvorak as "unusual", and such it surely is, for it represents a new form of doubling, called radial, in which the whorl is enlarged to accommodate a fifth petal. It is a favourite holiday sport in European gardens, I'm told, to seek out lilac florets with five petals, much as in this country we look for four-leaved clovers. Dvorak therefore notes "many 5-lobed florets". It is this especial character which, among others, has produced the breakthrough in the cv. 'Rochester' in 1963, a radial doubling with some florets having as many as 17 petals. These are freaks, of course.

Robert B. Clark.

Note: You may obtain your copy by sending \$5.50 to  
Fr. John L. Fiala, 7359 Branch Rd., Medina, OH.  
44256.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Beginning with the June issue of ILS NEWSLETTER,  
U.S. membership mailing will be by PERMIT out of Medina, OH.  
The copy should go into the mail on or about the 15th/20th  
of each month and reach you the reader (?) - please bear with  
us, we are attempting to reduce our total mailing costs. This  
is to be considered as a trial until further notice.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Pertinent to the Tentative INTERNATIONAL REGISTER of the  
GENUS SYRINGA - rough, hand-written copies (Xerox) of all  
corrections thru April 14, 1978 (prepared by: Freek Vrugtman,  
C. Holetich, J. Ruza and M. Levstek), and an Index to  
Originators (compiled by: Freek Vrugtman, IRA Syringa registrar)  
are available by writing to: INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY,  
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