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.

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"A Member Writes"

LIVE AND LEARN - I joined the Lilac Society and it was the best $5.00 I ever spent. I was intimidated by the prospect of revealing my horticultural ignorance, just about when I was beginning to think that I was no neophyte to this gardening game!

Here in Minnesota (and in Wisconsin too), you can see lilacs in almost every garden - even very old plantings flourish and are covered with bloom. These of course are the common purple, although here and there one can see the white form too. For some reason you just don't find many of the 'so called' French hybrids, perhaps they are thought to be somewhat less hardy. At any rate, only 3 or 4 of the named hybrids are ever offered at local garden centers - even the largest outlets offer no more than 7 or 8 different cultivars.

My first attempt at growing the more desirable forms ended in disaster for 10 nice healthy looking plants. I had selected a good spot (or so I thought) on a gentle slope in full sun - What better place? The drainage just had to be good! I followed all the directions and did everything right, but my efforts were expended in a spring planting and the ensuing heat of summer did the plants no favors in spite of watering and a lot of T.L.C., they suffered. However, the plants did hang on and go into the winter still alive with a look of promise, and after-all, in Minnesota "The Home of The Lilac" where there are literally millions of lilacs, everything would be fine come spring.

Lo and behold one fine day spring did arrive with all it's promise, but the lilacs appeared to be just sitting there, no bud-break, no foliage, no nothing. So, finally I dug up a few of the plants to see if the roots were still alive, and much to my horror, the plants were standing loose in a mess of "soupy" muck. All of my well prepared soil, fertilizer, etc. was for naught - the plants were dead - they had drowned in my well prepared basins (as they turned out to be), there was indeed no drainage. Instead of preparing good planting holes, I had

instead made watery graves for my lilacs.

It was about this time that I learned about ILS, and Walter Oakes very patiently guided me through a fall planting, and by staying away from the heavy clay where the drainage was only in the run-off of the slope, all made for a successful renewed effort.

I had great success in sprouting the lilac seeds that I received from the Society - they're planted in a good spot, but will have to wait and see what survives the winter. If I have any luck with them I'll let you know.

Mrs. Edward Hill,
Esko, Minnesota

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LILACS - John C. Wister*

(reprint)

The following dissertation is one of several papers concerning lilacs which appeared as a Lilac Symposium in the Arboretum Bulletin, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash.. This particular expression appeared in Vol. XI, No. 2 (Summer 1948) and is herein reprinted with the express permission of the Editor of that publication. The only changes being herein made are those involving the updating of certian Nomenclature in accordance with the Int'l Code concerning such.

Editor

The popularity of the common lilac which has been grown in this country since before the days of Washington and Jefferson has led to the planting of great lilac collections in many

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sections of the country from the Arnold Arboretum on the east to the Arboretum of the University of Washington on the west.

In all of these different plantings the so-called French varieties of the common lilac take the most important place. They are called French hybrids because so many of our finest varieties today have come from the firm of V. Lemoine & Fils of Nancy, France, but earlier work in their improvement was done in Belguim and other parts of the continent. Some of the more recent kinds have been raised in New York, Minnesota, in California and Canada.

The French lilacs give a season of bloom of a week or two in early May in and around Philadelphia, in late May in New England and upper New York state, with corresponding seasons in other parts of the country. The advent of a group of early flowering hybrids now classified by botanists as a hybrid species, x hyacinthiflora, brought to these gardens a week or two of bloom before any of the common lilacs opened. This early flowering group, therefore, is of the greatest importance.

The first variety of this group to become well known in this country was 'Lamartine', introduced by Lemoine in 1911. It is a most useful, strong growing variety of soft pinkish lilac color. Lemoine's newer varieties give little variation of color although 'Louvois' and 'Montesguieu' are darker and 'Necker' is pinker. 'Necker', in fact, fades almost to white, but a new American variety, 'Scotia', which is much like it, holds its color longer and better. All of these varieties resulted from the combination of Syringa vulgaris with Syringa oblata var. Giraldii

In 1917 Wilson found another botanical variety of the species oblata in Korea and it was named dilatata and brought to this country. It was a long time before gardeners realized that here was a most important plant. Its growth was quite different from Giraldii, it was broad and well-shaped instead of being leggy. It was even earlier in bloom; in fact it is the earliest of all lilacs and is a most attractive plant at all season. Its early foliage is bronze before turning green. Its autumn foliage turns bronze instead of keeping its green like other lilacs and is not subject to mildew. The distribution of

this plant was slow but finally gardeners came to realize its great value.

One plant breeder, Mr. F.L. Skinner of Dropmore, Manitoba, took it up in earnest and about 1935 introduced the first of the hybrid seedlings resulting in crossing this with vulgaris. Among these varieties was 'Assessippi', which is taking its place as one of the greatest of all lilacs, one of the earliest to bloom and most floriferous and most fragrant. It is a well-shaped plant and apparently does not become leggy, although perhaps plants old enough to display this characteristic do not yet exist in many places.

The color of 'Assessippi' is much like that of the Lemoine hybrids, but 'Pocahontas' is much deeper in color and, in the far north where the sun is not so hot, it is said to be as dark as 'Andenken an Ludwig Späth'. Under our conditions in eastern Pennsylvania it is not nearly as dark as its description would indicate but it is still the darkest of the group and valuable for that reason. Other varieties of the group have followed, the latest being 'Churchill' and 'Laurentian' which probably have not yet bloomed outside the garden of the originator, although plants are being grown in several collections in this country.

So much has been written about the French lilacs that it is not necessary to go into much detail here. It should be noted, however, that they also present some variation of season, the earliest being 'Comte Adrien de Montebello', 'President Lincoln' and 'Marechal Foch'. They follow quite closely after 'Lamartine' and others of the Lemoine early hybrid group. The growth and general appearance of the variety 'Marechal Foch' seem to me to indicate that it is a hybrid with the same parentage as 'Lamartine'. It has the same rapid growth and straggly habit. It flowers early, its spike is open and the color pinkish.

Dr. Rehder, who has carefully examined its microscopic botanical structure, states that there is no evidence that it is a hybrid. Therefore, botanically, it must continue to belong to the vulgaris group. I am inclined to think that for

our garden purposes it and 'President Lincoln' both should be grouped with the early hybrids.

Among the varieties of the French group, the latest to bloom are 'Victor Lemoine', 'Waldeck Rousseau' and 'Duc de Massa'. The latest double white variety is 'Siebold', a rather dwarf grower with deep creamy tinted buds. In the single whites 'Vestale' is earlier than 'Mont Blanc' although the time between the two is not great.

With the many hundreds of varieties being grown there is still a chance for important study concerning the adaptability of these varieties to different parts of the country. I have noted that certain varieties which have been very poor in the Philadelphia area have been magnificent farther north, particularly in Minnesota. These include many of the deep purple varieties such as 'Danton', 'Diderot' and 'Pasteur' which do not grow well in the east but seem to be strong in the colder climates do have much deeper coloring in more northern latitudes. It will be interesting to see if this will be true of two very beautiful varieties of the late Mr. T.A. Havemeyer, 'Sarah Sands' and 'Zulu', both of which seem to be poor growers. It remains to be determined whether Mr. Brand's new seedlings which are so magnificent with him will do well in the east and how well the seedlings of Mr. W.B. Clarke of San Jose, California, will do in the east.

The Persian lilacs bloom roughly with the French varieties. They suffer under a bad mixture of names, most plants sold as S. x persica being S. x chinensis. This unfortunate botanical name was given by mistake to the hybrid between x persica and vulgaris, which occurred as a natural hybrid in the botanical garden of Rouen late in the 18th century. The name rothomagensis is a much more happy choice, and the name Varin, or Varina, which commemorate the name of the director of the garden, is also used for this plant. The true x persica is not too strong growing in the east but x chinensis grows beautifully. It will be interesting to see how the new hybrids of x persica var. alba and oblata var. dilatata, raised by Mr. F.L. Skinner, will behave in different parts of the country. Theoretically, these should be stronger growing than x chinensis and bloom

earlier.

Many groups of late flowering hybrids are now in cultivation. Many of these are superior to the late blooming species which have long been known in botanical gardens but only a few of which have found their way into private gardens. Among these species, Josikaea and villosa are the best known. The little known Sweginzowii and reflexa are probably better garden plants. Among the hybrid groups the oldest and best known is the x Henryi group (Josikaea x villosa) which includes the variety 'Lutece'. Then there is an unnamed group (Henryi x tomentella) which includes 'Prairial'; the x josiflexa group (Josikaea x reflexa) which includes 'Bellicent' and 'Royalty' raised by Miss Preston in Ottawa; the x nanceiana group (Henryi x Sweginzowii) including 'Floreal' and 'Rutilant' which, like 'Lutece' and 'Prairial' were raised by Lemoine. The group x Prestoniae (villosa x reflexa) includes many varieties which are much alike. Miss Preston considers the varieties 'Audrey', 'Isabella', 'Jessica', 'Miranda' and 'Valeria' to be the most distinct. Finally there is an unnamed group (villosa x Sweginzowii) which includes the variety 'Hedin' raised by Skinner. Hybrids between additional species have been made and can be expected to appear in commerce from time to time. There is already room for much selection from the many kinds which have been introduced. Certainly, there are too many and in the limited range of form, color, and season a total of not more than a dozen or 25 varieties will be made.

There remains to be considered the latest blooming of all, which are the species grouped by the botanists under the subgenus Ligustrina indicating the close relation to the privets. Three of these are commonly grown, Syringa reticulata and its var. mandshurica, and Syringa pekinensis. The flowers come fairly late in June and are useful on account of their lateness. All of them are white. Up to the present time apparently no one has succeeded in crossing varieties of this subgenus with the varieties of the other botanical groups of Syringa.

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Hybrid Lilacs - F.L. Skinner*

(reprint)

The following dissertation is one of several papers concerning lilacs which appeared as a Lilac Symposium in the Arboretum Bulletin, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash.. This particular expression appeared in Vol. XI, No. 2 (Spring 1951) and is herein reprinted with the express permission of the Editor of that publication. The only changes being herein made are those involving the updating of certain Nomenclature in accordance with the Int'l Code concerning such.

Editor

To most people, hybrid lilacs mean the named varieties of the common lilac Syringa vulgaris, most of which have been raised by the French family Lemoine and have little of the "blood" of any other species than S. vulgaris in them. These so-called hybrids are very beautiful but unfortunately there are many places on this continent where they do not give of their best and their flowering season, even where they do well, is rather short. In some parts of Western Canada these better forms of the common lilac are liable to injury during our periodic hard winters and occasionally late spring frosts destroy their flower buds even as far south as Colorado.

As one goes south these common lilacs do not thrive as well as they do in some parts of Canada and the New England states where climatic conditions are more to their liking. At Washington, D.C., many lilacs look even less thrifty than they do with us in northern Manitoba, where hard winters are apt to kill them back every few years, and at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, Mr. Wister told me that some of the Lemoine varieties do not make nearly so nice a show as he has seen these same varieties do in central New York State.

Until 25 years ago little was done towards raising lilacs better suited to the climatic conditions of this continent other than by growing seedlings of some of the best varieties of

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the common lilac; in this the work of Mr. John Dunbar stands out pre-eminent.

In the autumn of 1918 I visited the Arnold Arboretum and the late Professor Sargent gave me a few one-inch-high seedlings Syringa oblata var. dilatata and S. patula, both grown from seed collected by Wilson in the Diamond Mountains of Korea in 1917. Though the Diamond Mountains lie on latitude 38 north and I live just north of latitude 51 and at an elevation of 1800 feet, still these Korean lilacs survived uninjured a winter that severely damaged many of my lilacs of European origin and have since proved as hardy as any of our native shrubs.

In 1921 Syringa oblata var. dilatata flowered in Canada for the first time and as I had a few flowers on some of the Lemoine varieties I succeeded in crossing them with S. oblata var. dilatata. In doing so I did not expect to get varieties that would compare with Lemoine's, but I did hope to get lilacs that would be better suited to our climate. In this I was not disappointed; some of these seedlings flowered just 18 months after the seeds had germinated under glass and from a hedge row of these seedlings I selected five that I considered were at least as good as 'Charles X' and much better suited for our climate than that variety. Moreover some of them had deep purple foliage in autumn and, interesting to relate, that original row of Syringa vulgaris x S. oblata var. dilatata has not yet started to sucker.

During the severe depression that caught rural western Canada in the late 1920's I had other things to think of than breeding new lilacs and little was done with Syringa oblata var. dilatata until in 1940 the Morton Arboretum reported favorably on the first five selections of these hybrids.

Since then many new combinations have been made at Dropmore; pollen of S. x persica and S. pinnatifolia has been used on some of original oblata var. dilatata hybrids and some of them have been bred back to the best of Lemoine's varieties and we now have so many really first class varieties that it is hard to decide which to name and which to discard.

In the villosa section of Syringa few hybrids have been raised in Europe other than those raised between S. villosa and S. Josikaea by the Lemoines. Probably the fact that neither S. reflexa nor S. Sweginzowii have been hardy in any but the mildest parts of Canada is responsible for the considerable number of hybrids in this section that have been raised in Canada.

Miss Preston of the Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa and I set out to raise hybrids of Syringa reflexa about the same time. Miss Preston, however, lived near enough to Boston to be able to visit the Arnold Arboretum and collect fresh pollen of S. reflexa while I had to rely on dried pollen sent me by Mr. Judd, with the result that her work bore fruit before mine did. These first hybrids of Miss Preston's gave rise to varieties with large open panicles of flowers in a wide range of mauve and lilac shades while mine had smaller panicles closely set with flowers in shades of pale to deep rose.

The Dominion Experimental Station at Morden, Manitoba carried Miss Preston's work a step further and secured a range of color from white through pink to wine-red and royal purple, while the best in the second generation of my hybrids has been in the rose shades.

Unfortunately, Miss Preston made the mistake of naming too many of her hybrids which has militated against their gaining the popularity they deserve. At Morden only a few were named and of these 'Coral', 'Redwine', and 'Royalty' will be standards of excellence for some time to come; their names denote their color. 'Hiawatha', a hybrid of mine with thickset spikes of rose-colored flowers, has already found favor with Dutch nurserymen and is probably the best of the first crosses of its type. 'Donald Wyman', the best to date of the second generation of those with rose-colored flowers, is deeper in color and fades less than any other of the villosa hybrids at the Arnold Arboretum.

At the Arnold Arboretum a natural cross between S. pinnatifolia and S. oblata var. Giraldii has given rise to a nice, quite fragrant, white flowered form that I have called (with the consent of Dr. Sax)'William H. Judd' in honor of the man who did so much for the Arnold Arboretum during his lifetime. This may have

value both for forcing and further breeding work.

Dr. Sax, working at the Arnold Arboretum, has succeeded in raising hybrids between S. pubescens and S. x persica; S. vulgaris and S. laciniata and between S. pinnatifolia and S. laciniata. I have not yet seen any of these in bloom but the latter is well worth growing for the beauty of its finely cut foliage.

Where will all this hybridization of the Syringa family take us? Is it likely to give us larger or more beautiful flowers than those now obtainable in the French lilacs, and, if not what advantage is there in increasing the number of named forms in a family that some gardeners contend already contains too many named varieties?

Personally I think there is a place, on this continent, for the villosa hybrids and that with the range of form and color now available, we can easily accommodate from twenty-five to thirty named varieties.

In the vulgaris section, the work that has been done at the Arnold Arboretum and at Dropmore shows that S. oblata, oblata var. dilatata, x persica, pinnatifolia, pubescens, patula, and vulgaris will all interbreed to a certain extent and if breeding work with these species is carried on in a large enough way we may expect to eventually get lilacs better suited to many parts of this continent than those now available; lilacs that will bloom early without suffering injury from spring frosts; lilacs that will bloom much later than any form of the common lilac now does; lilacs with clearer blue and red shades with upright spikes on which the individual flowers are wide enough spaced to show their individual form, and lilacs that can be cultivated with success both farther north and farther south than they can be at present.

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SYRINGA

Lilac

(reprint)

From: THE FLOWER-GARDEN; or, BRECK'S BOOK OF FLOWERS; In which are described all the various hardy herbaceous perennials, annuals, shrubby plants, and evergreen trees, desirable for ornamental purposes, with directions for their cultivation. By Joseph Breck, seedsman and florist, and former editor of the New England Farmer and the Horticultural Register. Boston, 1851.

"Various in array, now white,
Now sanguine, and her beauteous head now set
With purple spikes pyramidal."

Syringa, - some say from Greek, an Arcadian nymph, or, more properly, here, a pipe. The tubes of the finest Turkish pipes are manufactured from the wood of it; but the true root of the word is to be found in sirinx, its native name in Barbary. Lilac is a Persian word, signifying a flower. All the species are most beautiful flowering shrubs, readily propagated by suckers, which they throw up in abundance. The common Lilac seems to have been introduced before or during the reign of Henry VIII, for in the inventory, taken by the order of Cromwell, of the articles in the gardens of the palace of Nonsuch, are mentioned six Lilacs, - "trees which bear no fruit, but only a pleasant smell." - (Loudon).

Syringa vulgaris. - The Common Lilac. - This is so well known that it needs no description. The purple variety is found in almost every garden; the white is more scarce. Grown together, they are very beautiful; and, notwithstanding they are old-fashioned, common, and vulgar, with some people, we esteem them as some of our most valuable and ornamental shrubs of the season.

S.x persica. - Persian Lilac. - This species is "far more delicate and pretty than the common Lilacs, both in leaf and blossom. The bunches of flowers are frequently a foot long,

and weigh down the tender terminal slender shoots so as to give the plant a very graceful appearance. The white and purple, both beautiful; the Cut-leaved Lilac has interesting and delicate foliage." The Persian Lilac grows about four or five feet high. All the species bloom the last of May and the first of June.

The common Lilacs are suitable for the back of the shrubbery. "This was one of the first plants introduced by our forefathers, and is universally found; often in the front of ancient houses, growing almost to the size of a tree." To make a small tree of it, care must be taken to destroy all the suckers and keep a clean stem. The Persian varieties are suitable for planting in clumps, or in the front of the shrubbery. Some beautiful new varieties have been imported within a few years, producing immense clusters of flowers. There is one variety with double flowers, but it is not an improvement.

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BITS OF WIT

In former days, a fool and his money were soon parted; now it happens to everybody.

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It is difficult to build a reputation on what you are going to do, because well done is better than well said.

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Protect birds - the dove brings peace and the stork brings tax exemptions.

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YOUR SOCIETY ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR SUPPORT

Gracie Fields used to sing a song entitled, "You only want it 'cause you 'aven't got it". How many times have we heard an I.L.S. member bemoaning the fact that there was no conveniently sized packet of information about the Society to give a friend and prospective member? Well, did you "only want it 'cause you 'aven't got it"??? Because, with the enclosure in this issue of the "Newsletter", you now 'ave it and we hope you not only like it but use it. The copy enclosed is for you to examine and then to give to a person you'd like to interest in becoming that so-rewarding thing - - an I.L.S. member.

If additional copies can be used, they may be ordered from the Secretary.

Walter W. Oakes

* * *

THANK YOU WITH AN INVITATION

Dear Members:

So many of you sent me birthday cards that I can't begin to thank you each individually. But I do thank you for your thoughtfulness and good wishes.

We haven't as many lilacs at Swarthmore now as we used to have, but still if you can come to see them we shall welcome you here. We are less than half an hour from Philadelphia by train, or if you drive, less than that from I-95.

John C. Wister