

Lilac Newsletter

Vol. V, No. 6, June, 1979

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"

Dear Walter,

I've collected nut trees and crabapples for a long time - Lilacs, Magnolias and hardy bulbs have come along in more recent years. At the moment I have a plant of each; S. pekinensis, S. reticulata and a few S. villosa seedlings, and a couple of pink cultivars, S. x prestoniae 'Ethel M. Webster' and S. 'Ferna Alexander'. I suppose that one could say that I've always had a soft spot for lilacs because I have admired the bloom for many years and I really appreciate their fragrance. These fragrant ones of course would be the more old-fashioned forms I presume - in fact I only recently (last fall) dug a couple of starts from some old plantings on the place where we used to live. I have a sort of hang-up with various other items like Amaryllis (species), rare fruiting things like Diospyros, Cudrania, etc. (to name a few).

Actually I'm engaged in farming along with my brothers and we really get a lot of exercise trying to make a living, but included in our 360 acres is a small tract (20 acres of native woodland and about another 15 acres in a Sphagnum Bog) with some blueberries and cranberries growing there - this makes an excellent area in which to go "Birding". In fact we have a local Audubon Society group which meets each month, and we take four counts during the year. While many of my plants are still sort of small, you're welcome to stop by anytime and have a look - I have a nice row of Prunus sargentii that should be in bloom along about the third week in April.

I can't really give you too much of a Lilac Story, but there are a lot of lilacs here in the county. I'm probably the only guy in the world that ever pulled a giant old lilac bush out of the ground with a hay-rope. When I was a lad of only about 16 yrs., it was my job to drive a team of "Drafters" at the end of the big rope that pulled the "sling" of hay up into the loft. On this particular occasion with a pretty hefty load on board, the "big lugs" lunged sideways at the end of that taut rope and before I could get them unsnarled and settled down, they had successfully snagged the poor old lilac bush (5 to 6 "arm-sized"

trunks) and ripped it completely out of the ground. It stood pretty close to the house anyway, and nobody ever took the time to set it back where it belonged - maybe it was more important than I thought to get the hay into the mow on that particular day.

Our biggest problem here is Oyster shell scale (Lilac Scale) - there are a lot of native White Ash and a lesser number of Butternut trees that seem to be constantly infested with the stuff, so there's always a source of new insects just about the time you think that you have them under control. So, while I've had a kind of "off-again" - "on-again" contact with lilacs, I look upon my relatively long association with the genus as one of my more in-depth interests.

Isaac R. Hunter
Dowagiac, Michigan

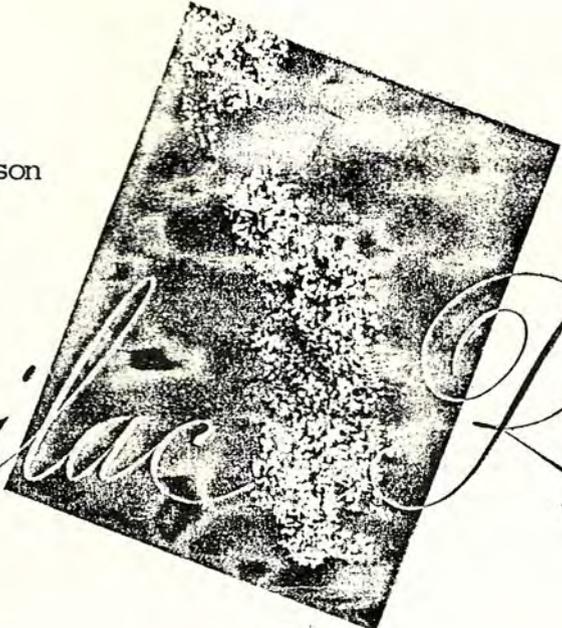
NOTE: In a more recent note I.R.H. tells me that he has added one plant each of 'Isabella' and 'Lucie Baltet' to his collection this spring - he's hoping to raise some pink seedlings one day down the road. Being a novice myself (with a scattering of dangerous knowledge), I'm wondering if either of these two selections actually set seed, or are they indeed sterile as many of the cultivars are found to be. Comment here would be educational to many I'm sure.

Ed

* * *

*(reprint)

by: Richardson
Wright



Lilac Rex

Whenever any enthusiastic gardener proclaims this or that flower, tree or shrubs to be King or Queen of all, there invariably arise shouting minorities whooping it up for their own favorites. For that reason, in calling the Lilac the King of Flowering Shrubs, I am not unmindful of the beauty of all the others that make the garden colorful and glorious in these days of Spring and early Summer. The Cotoneasters, the Bush Honeysuckles, the early Witch Hazels, the Mockoranges, even the ubiquitous Forsythia - each offers its own measure of delicate

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and abundant coloring. And yet none have such regal carriage as the Lilac, none so lasting in flower, so varied in color or so generous with fragrance.

Nor have I come to call the Lilac the King of Flowering Shrubs out of any hit-and-miss association with them. Over the past nineteen years I have been growing a carefully selected collection of hybrid and species Lilacs. They now number close to 100 kinds - enough of variety and experience with their cultivation to warrant writing about them.

Once a gardener has decided that the Lilac does stand head and shoulders over all other flowering shrubs, how does he go about selecting, planting, caring for these beauties? To what uses can they be put in garden design? Where and how should they be planted? What culture do they require? What kinds should one choose out of the embarrassing number of them on the market?

In garden design Lilacs can be used as specimens on a lawn, in conjunction with other flowering shrubs that bloom earlier or later, in foundation plantings around a house, each side the entrance gate of old-fashioned types of houses and in ranks as a hedge.

Thus a combination could be made by two or three high growing kinds - say - the hybrid 'Mme. Antoine Buchner', and the species villosa and josikaea, with low-trimmed Forsythia for an early bloom and low-growing Mockoranges for a later, with the Lilacs flowering between these two. Add to this around the edges Spring flowering bulbs, such as sheets of blue Grape Hyacinths forming a ground cover for a scattered planting of early Daffodils. Another interesting companionate group can be made of the early flowering Lilac 'Lamartine' and Rosa Ecae-mauve heads above the fountain-like gold of the species Rose from Turkestan.

Specimen Lilacs are given no competition with any other shrub. They stand alone in their glory. Consequently, one should select an especially glorious type for this purpose - say the noble white 'Vestale' or the pink 'Macrostachya' or

the purple 'Capitaine Baltet'. I can also see one of the species being used for a specimen - Syringa reflexa. With this the flower heads bend over gracefully and the whole bush, showing racemes of coral to pink, presents a most unusual and lovely sight.

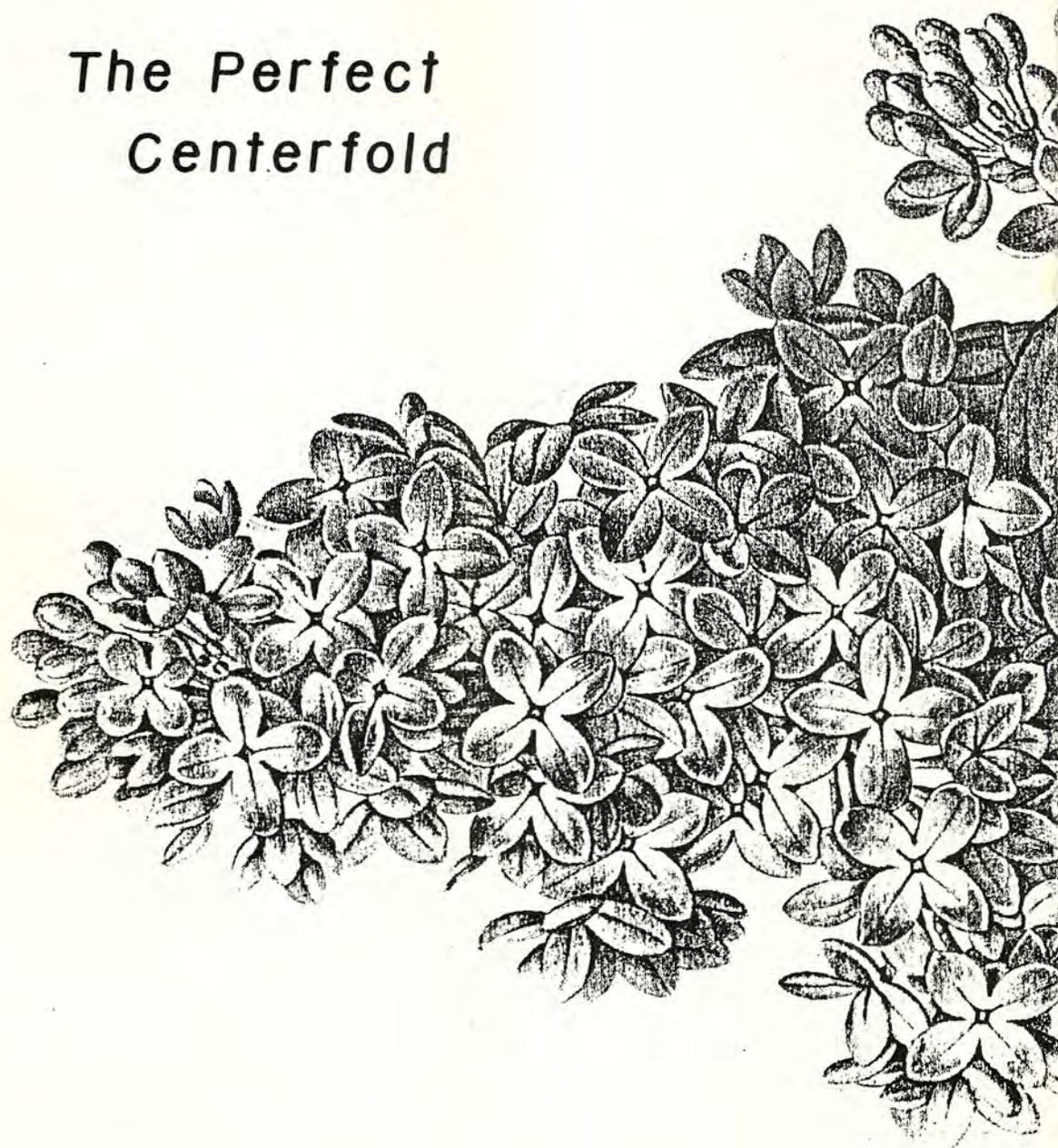
Our forefathers often planted Lilacs around their houses and at the entrance gate. For this purpose, if the house is of early American extraction, I would choose the common old Vulgaris types of Lilac in either white or purple. The more fancified modern French hybrids seem just a little out of place in such associations. These old types are surely the kind that Walt Whitman sang about in that marvelous poem on Lincoln which starts, "When Lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed."

Planted as a hedge, Lilacs soon make a sense of enclosure without an impenetrable wall. They should be set out not less than ten feet apart to afford room for mature growth. In this way they can be used to mask a building or plant out an objectionable view.

How and when should Lilacs be planted? Early spring or late fall in the neighborhood of New York is the advisable planting time. Make your hole a few weeks before the stock is due to arrive and take trouble with this preparation. Lilacs are lusty feeders. Once the bush is planted you can feed it only from the top. Make a \$5 hole for every \$1 bush. That is, unless your garden has extraordinarily good soil, excavate three or four feet wide and three feet deep. Save the sod and top spit of soil. Haul off the rest to the compost heap. Then from the compost heap bring the best soil your garden affords - the best of rotted leaves and manure and old sods with a sprinkling of lime. Put the top spit and chopped sods in the bottom of the hole. Tramp them down. Then pour in the good compost and water thoroughly.

While the Lilac does not want to be planted in a spot that is perpetually wet, it does require sufficient moisture. In setting out plants see that the roots are well watered in and the soil brought in contact with them. Then, if the location

The Perfect
Centerfold





P. J. Redouté.

Lilas.

Langlois.

is exposed to winds, add guy ropes to keep the shrub in place while its roots are fastening themselves into their new environment.

What sort of location is best for Lilacs? They need sun, so that too shady a spot should not be used. Half a day's sunlight is their minimum requirement for growth and setting buds.

I make a practice of not allowing a Lilac to bloom the first year after it is planted. This shrub makes a complicated set of roots. It is more important to get those roots developing than to see the flower for a year. On the roots depend the ultimate growth and beauty of the shrub. Often Lilacs grown on their own roots are exasperatingly slow in making top growth. I remember some in my garden that seemed literally to stand still for three years - then they started to jump! I consoled myself with knowledge of the root growth that was developing all this time. My patience has ever since been rewarded with magnificent growth and bloom from these bushes.

The beginning Lilac fancier will soon find himself caught in the cross-fire between two opposing camps - those who hold that Lilacs should be grown on their own roots and those who are satisfied with shrubs grafted on Privet stock or old common Lilac roots. I grow both kinds. I prefer those on their own roots. There is no need to watch for Privet suckers springing up and no danger from infection at the graft. However, when I can't get them on their own roots, I have to be satisfied with grafted plants, and many of them have developed into noble bushes.

Once the bush is set in place, what else do you do? You watch for oyster-shell scale developing on the branches and you hunt the wily borer. The borer gives himself away by the sawdust trail he leaves behind. Examine your Lilacs every so often. Watch for that sawdust. Trace it back to the hole and go after the borer with a pliable wire. A branch infected with borer will soon show drooping foliage. This little devil often works just below the surface around the main stalk.... The oyster

shell scale is cleaned off with a scrubbing brush and the branch washed down with lime sulphur.

If the season is dry we keep a manure mulch around the Lilacs or else water them with a water-sword that gets the moisture right down to the roots.

We also follow a regular régime of top-feeding. In Autumn the soil around them is sprinkled generously with potash - hardwood ashes are splendid for this purpose. This is scratched in. In Spring, just as the frost is coming out of the ground they have a powdering of lime dug in. Finally, as the buds are bursting into growth we supply a dressing of bone meal which will carry the bushes through the growing season. When grass comes up fairly close around the bush, these feedings are made with a crowbar - drive the crowbar down a foot and drop in the food. These holes are sunk a foot apart around the perimeter of the foliage.

Now we can gird up our loins and tackle that perplexing question of what kinds to grow. Well, do you like 'em white or mauve or pink or purple or blue or almost black? Do you like them single or double? Do you require a heavy fragrance or a delicate whiff? Do you want to have the latest produced hybrids or will you be satisfied with some older kinds? Do you want their bloom early, midseason or late? Are you curious about some of the species?

The late Theodore A. Havemeyer, who raised the greatest collection of Lilacs in this country, once set my tyro feet in the right Lilac path by giving me the list of his favorite dozen. They were: 'Laplace', purple, single; 'Léon Gambetta', pink, double; 'Paul Thirion', violet, double; 'Mme. Antoine Buchner', rose, double; 'Lucie Baltet', pinkish, single; 'Vestale', white, single; 'Réaumur', reddish purple, single; 'Macrostachya', pink, single; 'Olivier de Sèrres', purple, double; 'Jules Simon', mauve, double; 'President Poincare', red, double; josikaea, pink, species.

This selection, as I said, was made many years ago and is still a good dozen for beginners, affording both old and new

types of single and double flowers and an extensive season of bloom.

Another beginner's collection would be: 'Necker', pinkish, single; 'Marie Finon', white, single; 'Katherine Havemeyer', pink, double; 'Le Nôtre', deep lilac, double; 'Claude Bernard', mauve; 'Lavoisier', rose, single; 'Decaisne', blue, single; 'Jeanne d'Arc', white, double; 'Edith Cavell', white, double; 'Mont Blanc', white, single; 'President Viger', blue, double; 'Lamartine', lilac, single.

John Wister, who is also a Lilac collector of distinguished taste and great experience, gives his list as follows:

White, single: 'Marie Finon', 'Mont Blanc', 'Vestale'.
White, double: 'Edith Cavell', 'Jeanne d'Arc', 'Miss Ellen Willmott', 'Virginite'. Violet, blue and bluish lilac, single: 'Cavour', 'De Mirabel', 'Decaisne', 'President Lincoln', 'Boule Azurée', 'Maurice Barres'. Violet, blue and bluish lilac, double: 'Emile Gentil', 'Maréchal Lannes', 'Olivier de Serres', 'President Viger', 'René Jarry-Desloges'. Lilac, single: vulgaris, 'Marengo', 'Massena', 'Maréchal Foch'. Lilac, double: 'Henri Martin', 'Hippolyte Maringer', 'Thunberg', 'Victor Lemoine'. Pinkish, single: 'Lucie Baltet', 'Macrostachya'. Pinkish, double: 'Mme. Antoine Buchner', 'Waldeck-Rousseau'. Magenta to red, single: 'Congo', 'Mme. F. Morel', 'Mrs. W.E. Marshall'. Magenta to red double: 'Georges Bellair', 'Paul Thirion'. Purple, single: 'Capitaine Baltet', 'Monge', 'Rochambeau', 'Vesuve'. Purple, double: 'Archevêque'.

This selection of forty hybrids would give a garden great distinction. It also affords, besides a range of color, a variety of heights. It is well to remember that 'Vesuve' is dwarf and both 'Georges Bellair' and 'Réaumur' are low growers and 'Marechal Lannes' is the largest of all. 'Lamartine', 'Claude Bernard', 'Lavoisier' and 'Necker' are among the earliest to bloom.

The beginner by this time may be overwhelmed. Patience! Patience! We have considered mainly only the hybrids. What of the species and the hybrids from them? Surely no collection

can be complete without some wild species. A beginner's group of species might include S. x persica, villosa, pubescens and reflexa.

S. x persica grows to about 8' high and has slender branches. Its fragrant, pale lilac flowers are carried in loose panicles. S. villosa is a sturdy fellow with large leathery leaves and will attain 12' at maturity. The flowers, erectly held, are lilac pink. A close cousin to villosa is S. josikaea, the Hungarian Lilac. S. reflexa, or Nodding Lilac, is among my favorites. Its long, slender panicles are carmine in the bud and open a rich pink. Sometimes the panicles give a general effect of coral tint.

From this beginning a gardener who is curious about species and has plenty of room to grow them could pass on to other kinds. One type of the Rouen Lilac, x chinensis f. metensis, as sent me from the Arnold Arboretum, bears its light slaty colored flowers in a long club-like panicle and is quite wayward in its growth. S. oblata is tall-growing and early flowering. S. microphylla, which hails from North China and Korea, has small rounded leaves and loose, lilac-pink flower panicles. S. tomentella has extraordinary, deep lilac flowers which fade to white. A relatively small shrub, not growing much higher than 6', is S. julianae, with downy leaves and loose mauve blossoms. The final one to bloom is the Tree Lilac, S. pekinensis, with small creamy flowers not unlike the bloom of Privet. This and another Tree Lilac, S. reticulata, flower in late June. For the earliest try S. x hyacinthiflora, which is really a hybrid and bears bluish flowers.

There are other hybrids and other colors of hybrids, but these suffice, unless one is making his own little botanical garden.

Just a word more - select varieties that will give a long season of bloom - early, mid-season and late. After they have flowered, clip off the dried panicles and clear out branches that rub or give the bush a mis-shapen appearance. Otherwise keep the secateurs away from Lilacs.

* * *



from the Registrar's Desk

Freek Vrugtman, Curator of Collections, Royal Botanical Gardens,
Box 399, HAMILTON, Ontario, CANADA. L8N 3H8

With this June 1979 issue of the LILAC NEWSLETTER you also will have received a revised (April 1979) "Index to Originators" referred to in the Tentative International Register of Cultivar Names in the Genus Syringa L.

We suggest that you insert the Index to Originators into your Tentative International Register. If you do not have a copy of the Tentative International Register you may write to

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I would like to remind everyone interested in the history of the garden lilac that correcting and updating the Tentative International Register and its companion, the Index to Originators, is an on-going everlasting project at the Royal Botanical Gardens; rarely a week passes without new information being added or erroneous entries being corrected. I am very grateful to all those ILS Members who have supplied me with information on or pictures of lilac originators, and who responded to my notes "from the Registrar's Desk" in the NEWSLETTER, or to my many letters. And to those of you who still have not replied to my letter(s): "PLEASE answer, I need your help or information!"

* * *

BITS OF WIT

Be like a good watch - open face, busy hands, precisely regulated and full of positive tick.

Be sure to treasure your friends. If it were not for them you'd be a total stranger.

Air pollution is turning Mother Nature prematurely gray.

Who knows what would happen if everyone dared to speak 100% truthfully.

"Anyone can criticize" Aristotle said, "that is easy; but to criticize the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way, that is not within everyone's power and is not easy."

The person who says youth is a state of mind invariably has more state of mind than youth. Age is mostly a matter of mind. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Counting time is not as essential as making time count.
