



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.

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LILACS DO GET OLD !!

("OLD LILACS") NEWSLETTER Vol. IV, No. 9 - p. 11

Apparently in the Aug. 1, 1938 issue of HORTICULTURE a sharp "eye" observer noted that since Arizona was claiming the largest Climbing Rose, and California was holding 'top billing' for the Grapevine it only seems natural that New Hampshire at the far side of the continent should be the place of the largest Lilac, particularly since the lilac is the N.H. State Flower. However, this "see'm and measure'm" sleuth very wisely included a disclaimer in that he openly admitted that he could not offer absolute proof that there was not still larger plants lurking out there someplace, and welcomed such response as might be appropriate to the fact.

The lilac that he had in mind was indeed located in Portsmouth, NH. and at that time was almost 200 years old, with a single trunk measuring no less than three feet and eight inches in circumference (over 14 inches in dia.) and growing with a single stem. The plant (he says) is in good condition and blooms freely each year.

Records of good foundation would indicate that the first house in the Little Harbor section of Portsmouth was probably built in 1690 (Wentworth Mansion), a second house was built nearby and lilacs were planted at both dwelling sites. It is, however, at the Wentworth House where this particularly large lilac stands, the flowers are appropriately white. Around the other house one might find the purple flowered form which are without a doubt just as old, but have suckered more freely and the stems are many and smaller.

The understanding was in 1938 that the plants were originally imported by Governor Wentworth about 1750, some of them being given to his neighbor. The second house was occupied by a Martine family for over forty years, hence the name today is the Martine Cottage. The owner of the property in '38 was a Mr. R. Clipston Sturgis who offered the historical data.

Editor

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WONDER WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY ??

In the August 15, 1939 issue of HORTICULTURE it was reported at the New Hampshire Federation of Garden Clubs Meeting that there was much interest in some of the reports given, particularly one that had to do with the planting of lilacs. Seems that a project was gaining favor wherein the New Hampshire garden clubs which were encouraging the planting of lilacs throughout the state, particularly since the lilac was the state flower.

The plan offered was calling for a continuous roadside planting of lilacs that would stretch from Rochester to Keene (the writer indicated that if he was not mistaken this might have been Route 111). It was not expected to be a hedge type planting, but rather the anticipation was one that would provide a hit-n-miss with the hope that at bloom time there would always be a lilac in view as one drove that particular stretch of public highway. In the Milford area and in many of the adjoining towns many of the plants were already making a very colorful showing - specimens set out last spring are reported to be thriving in spite of an almost unprecedented drought (1939).

*Such ambitious undertakings always seem to conjure up a lot of enthusiasm and not too infrequently bring out the best in people, and, very often these endeavors do indeed develop into long lasting streaks of beauty - I WONDER WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY ??

*Editor

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A LONGER LILAC SEASON - D.F. Cameron*

*(reprint)

One of the most reliable flowering shrubs for Canadian conditions is the common lilac of Central Europe, Syringa vulgaris and its garden varieties, generally sold as French hybrid lilacs. With their wide range of colors and attractive foliage they are much appreciated by Canadian gardeners for their beauty, and may be found growing successfully from coast to coast.

Unfortunately, this group of lilacs has a relatively short blooming season. Among other faults it has a tendency to legginess and is susceptible to mildew and certain insect pests.

In order to extend the blooming season of the lilac and to obtain some improvement of form, the late Dr. W.T. Macoun, former Dominion Horticulturist, decided to cross some of the late blooming species which had proven themselves hardy at Ottawa, where winter temperatures of 20 or 30 degrees below zero frequently occur. This work was started in 1920 by Miss Isabella Preston.

Syringa villosa, a very hardy Chinese species, was chosen

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*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. XIV, 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

as the female parent, and Syringa reflexa, the Nodding Lilac, a less hardy species with narrow drooping panicles of rosy-pink flowers, as the male parent. From this cross about 250 seedlings were grown, some of which flowered in 1924.

The hybrid origin of these seedlings was noticeable and there were many variations within the lot, especially in the size of the inflorescence, a few being quite small, but the majority having much larger panicles than either parent, with a free, open-branching habit.

In color they varied from very pale pink through pinkish-lilac to very deep lilac, in most cases the color of the buds being somewhat darker. The plants themselves differed from their parents and from other existing lilacs in many respects. They grew vigorously with less tendency to legginess as new branches continued to grow from near the ground level. The bushes had a round-topped shape and the clean but coarse foliage was attractive. The blooming period was that of the S. villosa parent, and most of them came into bloom just after the ordinary lilacs faded, thus prolonging the lilac season for a week or ten days.

Other desirable characteristics were their extreme hardiness, the unusual pink color of the bloom and their annual floriferous habit even when growing in poor soil. In addition they appeared to be resistant to disease and insect pests.

The few undesirable characteristics were the brittleness of the young branches in very stormy weather, lack of fragrance in most varieties and the large size of the bush, which reaches a height of ten feet, covering an area of 12 or 15 feet. For this reason they are hardly suitable for planting in small gardens but they are admirably suited for use as specimen plants or in groups on large lawns or park areas.

It is of interest that the reciprocal cross (S. reflexa x S. villosa) produced only one seedling which was not considered worthy of further propagation.

About this time, Mrs. Susan Delano McKelvey, the well-

known authority on the lilac was engaged in the preparation of her monograph, "The Lilac." In 1927 she visited the experimental farm at Ottawa, and after seeing the new race of lilacs in bloom, decided to name them Syringa x Prestoniae, in honor of their originator. She also named and described in her monograph, two varieties of S. x Prestoniae which represented the extreme types of variation. These two varieties were 'W.T. Macoun' and 'Isabella'. Later, several other varieties were named, the names selected being those of Shakespeare's heroines, but of these named varieties and of the unnamed seedlings many have since been discarded as unsuitable and only the best types kept for propagation.

The following is a list of the best x Prestoniae varieties which have been selected for distribution to commercial nurserymen. The hardiness of these lilacs has been proven by their very satisfactory performance at Brandon and Morden in Manitoba and at Beaverlodge in the Peace River district of Alberta. Several varieties of these x Prestoniae lilacs have been sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and Edinburgh and a number are growing in private gardens throughout the British Isles and United States where they are reported to be most satisfactory.

In the following descriptions the colors spelled with capitals refer to Ridgway's "Colour Standards and Colour Nomenclature," and only to the inner part of the open bloom, the color of the unopened buds and of the outer portions of the flower usually being of a darker shade.

Light Colored:

'Audrey': Flower panicles nine inches long, five inches wide, full but loosely arranged, broadest at two-thirds of height, with long lower branches and drooping tips. Purplish-Lilac fading to almost white. Makes quite a large bush.

'Celia': Panicles large, loose, 10½ inches long, nine inches wide, drooping at the tips, form regular even branching habit, frequently with two lateral panicles. Pale Vinaceous Lilac. Slight, pleasant fragrance. Very showy and floriferous. One of the latest.

'Desdemona': Panicles 6 3/4 inches long, 7 1/2 inches wide, tapering to the semi-pendulous tips; branching habit wide and loose. Palest Light Pinkish-Lilac. Late blooming. One of the best.

'Ursula': Panicles large, 11 1/2 inches long, seven inches wide, cone-shaped, loose and graceful, widest at two-thirds of height. White, faintly tinged with Pale Lilac. Slight pleasant odor. Blooms well. Similar to 'Virgilia', but taller.

'Virgilia': Panicles 8 1/2 inches long, nine inches wide, spreading and graceful; shape from broad bunch to shortish cone; tips drooping, side branches long and close. Pale Lilac.



"Fountain" (*S. reflexa* x *S. Sweginzowii*) x *S. reflexa*



"Fountain." Close-up view showing the long, pendulous flower clusters

Dark Colored:

'Alice': Panicles 9 1/2 inches long, six inches wide, tall, cone-shaped, tips drooping. Pale Lilac to Purplish-Lilac. One of the darkest varieties, and one of the last two in bloom.

'Elinor': Panicles 7 1/2 inches long, 5 3/4 inches wide; long, cone-shaped, with a few short branches. The panicles appear narrow and have the drooping habit of the *S. reflexa* parent. Very Pale Lobelia Violet. A prolific bloomer. One of the best dark colored varieties.

'Jessica': Panicles large, 10 inches long, 11 inches wide, conical shape tapering to tips, with open branching habit.

Terminal panicles often have four laterals. Argyle Purple. One of the darkest varieties, blooms late and has a pleasant fragrance.

Two worthwhile varieties have been obtained from open-pollinated seed of the x Prestoniae lilacs. One of these is 'Romeo', an upright growing shrub having decidedly pink flowers with dark, reddish stems. The other is 'Oberon', also upright in habit, with large, erect panicles of pale pink flowers well distributed over the plant. From a distance the flowers appear white.

Another cross made in 1920 was S. Josikaea x S. reflexa. It was named S. x josiflexa, and the only plant obtained from this cross was given the variety name 'Guinevere'. Its large panicles of Purplish-Lilac flowers hold the color better than most lilac.

In 1924 open pollinated seeds of 'Guinevere' were sown, and four of the resulting seedlings were selected for distribution. Three of them are distinctly pink, and were named 'Bellicent', 'Enid' and 'Lynette'. The fourth 'Kim', is purplish.

'Bellicent' is the most ornamental of the group, and grows up to seven or eight feet tall, with fine stems and branches. It has a light, graceful, attractive habit. The panicles are five to six inches long, four inches wide, drooping, with many long, leafy laterals of bloom. Pale Rhodonite-Pink. Very distinctive. Was awarded the First Class Certificate of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1946.

'Enid' has an upright habit of growth and very attractive appearance. Panicles are six to nine inches long, 6 1/2 inches wide, usually with two lateral clusters. A good shade of pink.

'Lynette', a sister seedling of 'Bellicent', but different in all respects. Leaves are mottled. Panicles are open, seven to ten inches long, four inches wide with several long, leafy laterals carrying bloom. Tourmaline-Pink. Upright habit of growth.

'Kim' makes a tall, strong bush much like *S. Josikaea*. Panicles are long, open, ten inches long, five inches wide. Purplish-Lilac, tips pale.

A later second generation seedling of *S. x josiflexa* 'Guinevere' is 'Elaine', a tall, vigorous, very erect growing shrub, with large, coarse leaves, distinct from other lilacs. Flower panicles upright, six to 12 inches long, five inches wide, with several laterals. Flower buds Pale Rose-Purple, open bloom white, faintly fragrant. Blooms about three weeks after the French hybrids.

Two of our best and more recent hybrids which so far have not been widely distributed are 'Fountain' and 'Ethel M. Webster'. 'Fountain' is the result of a backcross (*S. reflexa* x *S. Sweginzowii*) x *S. reflexa*. It makes a rounded bush six or seven feet tall and for two weeks is covered with long, pendulous flower clusters of Pale Purplish-Lilac. It is an excellent variety for use as a specimen shrub for a lawn. (see illustrations)

'Ethel M. Webster' is a hybrid between *S. reflexa* and a plant variously identified as *S. wolfii* and *S. Sweginzowii*. This variety is very floriferous and makes a symmetrical bush. Panicles are eight to ten inches long, six inches wide, tapering to a point with the nodding habit of *S. reflexa*. Pale Laelia-Pink.

In addition to the late flowering lilacs already described, a number of early flowering varieties have been produced. From *S. vulgaris* var. 'Negro' x 'Lamartine', two seedlings were selected and named 'Norah' and 'Muriel'. Open pollinated seed of 'Lamartine' produced 'Patricia' and 'Peggy', these forms of *S. x hyacinthiflora* are early flowering, and come into bloom before *S. vulgaris* varieties. Their growth habit is similar to varieties of *S. vulgaris* with the exception of 'Norah' which makes a rounded bush, furnished to ground level.

'Norah' has large panicles of large flowers of Dull Magenta-Purple. 'Muriel' has large panicles of lilac. 'Patricia' is quite distinct from the others, having large, open panicles of Purplish-Lilac. Individual flowers are large and double.

'Peggy' has long, loose, open panicles with terminal branching. Blooms freely. Verbena-Violet changing to Argyle-Purple. Individual flowers large, single. A choice pale variety.

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THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH --

It was indeed heartwarming to receive the "Well Wishing" card with the many signatures. Actually we were coming along real good from the first encounter that dictated our staying home, then on June 6 a slight accident struck in our household and my 'Good Wife' had to once more return to the Hospital (little or no connection between the two trips). Presently (June 18) she is making progress, but slowly and at this writing it would appear that she just may get to come home by the end of the week. Thanks again for your concern - hopefully we'll be fortunate enough to find ourselves in Medina, OH. in 1980.

Dorothy & Walter Eickhorst

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