



# 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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HAPPY NEW YEAR

January is a time which to many is a month of reality, trying to justify our over indulgence in the closing of one year and the birth of another. Be that as it may, somehow we'll get the bills paid and readjust our sights to meet the challenges of those things that will make up our individual life patterns. It is a time for planning and thinking, a time to take stock of those things which we failed to accomplish last year and make new promises unto ourselves that a "squiggen" of greater dedication will carry each of our hopes up the ever steeper hill to success.

I.L.S. has made great strides during the immediate past couple of years, and while the challenges are yet considerable, the ray of hope glows ever brighter as the desire and anticipation of greater goals appear within our grasp. Resolve now that you will in some way or manner put your shoulder to the wheel that has for so long remained mired in uncertainty, that we might move our common cause to more lofty heights. As a member you are a part of this cause and purpose, so, share with us that which you have come to recognize as a pleasure in your association with a growing plant Society.

May the New Year Bless You with all that is good, and particularly may you each and every one be the recipient of a generous portion of Good Health.

Walter E. Eickhorst, Editor

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Enjoy Your Lilacs

(By Knowing More About Them)

Roy S. Leighton

(\*reprint)

In this country no flower has had a greater popularity than the lilac, as can easily be proven by the number of fine old clumps that are seen growing by the foundations of some of the oldest farm houses in New England and the Middle States. Yes, it has been said that they are as American as apple pie.

Many of these old clumps of bushes were once the only bit of color and beauty that found its way into the hard lives of our pioneer settlers, and they are now often the only remaining evidence of an old farmhouse.

Today the lilac remains the most important and the most popular of our spring-blooming shrubs and rightly so, for it is hardy everywhere, grows well, and gives abundant crops of wonderfully fragrant flowers each year, with a minimum of care. All this and a duration of life, which is not as yet known, is God's gift to man.

*Many Uses*

A lilac bush spells home as perhaps no other shrub does. Generations of gardeners have planted it where they could enjoy its fresh beauty and fragrance each spring. You should consider its use in your foundation plantings about your home, for tall

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\*The following dissertation appeared in The Arboretum Bulletin, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash. (June 1944) 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

screening hedges, as an accent for the back of a perennial planting, as a specimen in your flower garden or on your lawn. Truly there is no shrub which has more uses for your landscaping effect.

#### *First Mention of The Lilac*

Lilacs have been cultivated and loved by the people of Europe for nearly 400 years. One of the first known writings to mention this flower was a travel account of the French naturalist, Pierre Belon, in his book entitled "Observations", written in 1554.

Their introduction into America was in the early Colonial days at a date said to have been about 1650. The first authentic record was of a planting made in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1750.

#### *Natural Habitat*

The lilac is not a native of North America but may be grown with success in all parts of the United States except in the extreme southern states. It is truly an old world group of shrubs and small trees confined to Asia, with exceptions such as Syringa reticulata, which is found on the island of Japan, and Syringa patula from the Dagelet Island in the Japanese Sea.

A further breakdown by species would show:

S. vulgaris (common lilac) from Jugo-Slavia, Greece and Bulgaria.

S. Josikaea - from Rumania, Jugo-Slavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

S. emodi - from the Himalayas and Afghanistan.

S. reticulata var. mandshurica - from southeast Siberia, Korea and Manchuria.

S. pekinensis - from North China.

S. oblata var. Giraldii, microphylla, x persica, Sweginzowii, tomentella, villosa, pubescens and many others from China.

The Persian lilac (which is really Chinese, not Perisan) is an old inhabitant of our gardens.

#### *The Common Lilac (Syringa vulgaris)*

The common lilac, Syringa vulgaris, a species and not a named variety, is still very much worth growing. I would not be without it as it is the old-fashioned American meaning of the lilac. It was originally found growing in the mountains of Central Europe and it has been cultivated as a garden plant since the 16th Century. Few, if any other, flowering shrubs have been known, grown, and loved over such a long period.

#### *Lengthen The Lilac Season*

Lilac time is short even at its best, so why don't we take advantage of the many half-sisters of our common garden lilacs to start the season earlier in the spring and push it later into the summer? In so doing, the season is lengthened for over two months.

Perhaps you are not familiar with the other types of lilacs, although surely one may notice that they are not exactly alike. The flowers of some are in dense clusters, while others are loose and feathery. The leaves vary from those broadly heart-shaped to some that are tiny, long, and tapering. While assortment of color has wide range, not only from type to type but even within each private family group, these are the species and species hybrids.

#### *Interesting Species Worth Growing*

Outside of large collections, it is rare to find in cultivation more than a few lilac species and a couple of the hybrids.

Syringa oblata var. dilatata is the earliest of all lilacs to bloom and is oddly the only one with brilliant autumn foliage; thus it catches our attention not only first but last. Its flowers are lilac pink. The leaves are broad and leathery,

turning vivid red in the fall.

The Chinese lilac (Syringa x chinensis) or "Rouen lilac" has finely textured foliage and graceful, dainty blossoms. It follows 10 days after the early lilac and blooms in both lavender and white. It is a hybrid resulting from crossing the common lilac with the true Persian. It is often incorrectly called the Persian lilac, but it is more profuse flowering. The branches of the true Persian lilac are drooping and willowy and the leaves show a tendency to be lobed.

Syringa laciniata. Although an old variety, mentioned by botanists as early as 1620, this plant is almost unknown today. The most striking characteristic of this worthwhile variety is its unique foliage. Its graceful branches are covered with feathery, pinnately lobed leaves resembling those of the locust. The blossoms are similar to those of S. persica but somewhat darker.

Syringa pubescens. A very beautiful species from the mountains near Peiping. Its slender, erect branches form a shrub of remarkable symmetry. There is an airy grace about its blooms which literally cover the plant from the ground up. Its dainty blossoms, long tubed and starlike, possess an exquisite clovelike perfume. The florets are lavender lilac with violet anthers and are borne in broad panicles. The leaves are small and hairy. This lilac is considered one of the rarest in cultivation.

Syringa reflexa or "nodding lilac" is a wonderful new form with pink flowers found in the mountains of Central China in 1901. Two outstanding characteristics are the pale rose color of its blossoms and its graceful wisteria-like, drooping, flower panicles from nine to twelve inches in length. The bright red of the buds contrasts strikingly with the beautiful pink of the open flowers. It has been awarded a medal by the Royal Horticultural Society. It is a very hardy species. Recently a pure white form has been introduced which is also striking.

Syringa microphylla is called the "twice-blooming lilac",

because it sometimes does just that, flowers twice during the same season with a profusion of lacy, pale pink blooms, delightfully fragrant.

Syringa x persica, long thought to be a native of Persia, we now know is indigenous to China. It is a favorite among Asiatic peoples. The name is a geographical misnomer. For several centuries it was assumed to be native of Persia. It was not until 1915 that the true home of this species was made known - a mountainside of Southern Kansu. However, it has become naturalized on the hill slopes in Persia. It is the greatest wanderer of all the species.

This fine species trails behind the French hybrids, its flowers still being in bud when most lilacs are in full splendor. It has finely cut foliage and lacy, rather than dense, panicles of bloom. It comes in several shades of pink and white. If you have never seen a hedge planting of these gems, you will await a breath-taking occasion. They are fast growing, dense, and compact.

Syringa reticulata. The "white flowering tree lilac" is the last of all in the procession, in some localities not blooming until July. Give this species plenty of space for it grows tall and broad, as the common name implies. The flowers resemble the common privet bloom, displaying a blanket of whiteness on well established bushes.

#### *A New Race of Hybrids From Canada*

Hybrids are produced by the crossing of plants differing more or less in kind, but usually related and of the same genus.

A great deal of interest has been created by a line of new hybrid lilacs coming to us from Canada, largely the work of Miss I. Preston of Ottawa and Mr. F.L. Skinner of Manitoba, Canada.

Miss Preston's are hybrids of S. villosa and S. reflexa and are, therefore, mostly late-flowering. They all grow into large, open branching bushes with heavy leaves like villosa. The panicles are plume-like and the colors all run in lavender and pinks. They are sure to find a place of importance when

better known.

Mr. Skinner's are hybrids of *S. oblata* var. *dilatata* and o. var. *Giraldii* and are for this reason all early-flowering. They all give great promise. They have a pronounced fragrance, a trait inherited from the Korean parent. They have attractive foliage, purplish tinged in the spring, and deep purple in the autumn. They are extremely hardy and are apparently free from the often objectionable suckering habit of *vulgaris* and its varieties.

*Modern, But Little Known, French Hybrid Lilacs*

In America today there are many fine lilac collections, both public and private, a number of them containing as many as three or four hundred varieties.

But that small grower who has room for only a little of this and a little of that is woefully backward in that he is content to grow comparatively poor or long-since superseded varieties of lilacs.

Those who know only the old white and purple forms grown by our grandparents can have no idea of the wonderful beauty of the grand, new French hybrid group of modern lilacs. Their color variation is found to begin with creamy white, and to advance through shades of flesh and rosy pink, Wedgewood blue, violet, deep red, and rich purple, and variegated blooms showing two or more colors in the same flower.

The flowers are single and double and vary greatly in form of truss and in blooming season. Common and old-fashioned lilacs usually do not bloom until they attain a large size. French hybrid lilacs, if undisturbed, frequently bloom when 18 inches tall and within a relatively short time after transplanting. They comprise the largest and most individually varied collection. Their blossoms are often enormously large, 12 to 14 inches in height and breadth, with single, semi-double or double types of individual florets. It is not uncommon to have single florets one inch in diameter. The era when "lilac" was synonymous with "lavender" is past.

*Origination of The French Hybrids*

It was in 1843 that Liebert Darimont, nursery man of Liege, Belgium, brought out a double lilac known as Syringa vulgaris 'Azurea Plena'. Its origin is obscure, although it may well have been a seed sport of the common lilac. Its flowers, however, were small and malformed. Twenty-seven years later in the little town of Nancy, France, Victor Lemoine, one of the world's greatest hybridizers and plant breeders, began crossing Darimont's plant with the best single varieties of the time. It has been said that when Victor Lemoine began his work, he crossed more than 100 flowers the first year and harvested exactly seven seeds. However, it was he who, after years of patient and painstaking labor, first gave to the world those exquisite modern lilacs that we call "French hybrids." Other varieties, which came from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States in later years, have also become known as "French hybrids."

To this day the Lemoine descendants are still carrying on. Working 30 years in the last century and 40 years in this, they have introduced over 200 of the now 500 improved forms. Of these 200, 79 varieties to be found in the most recent symposium of the best 100 varieties.

*Other Notable French Hybrid Originators*

Twenty-seven other persons, European and American, might be termed modern breeders in that most of their work was in the present century, that is, Stepman, Mount Blanc, and Spaeth from Europe. They produced 32 varieties, only part of which are of importance today.

Five additional modern American and Canadian breeders produced among them over 200 varieties, as follows:

	Varieties
John Dunbar.....	32
T.A. Havemeyer.....	30
Mrs. Hulda Klager.....	62
Miss I. Preston (Canada).....	84
F.L. Skinner (Canada).....	11

Two new recent American breeders are Mr. A.M. Brand and Mr. W.B. Clarke who appear to be the only present breeders working on a large scale.

It is interesting to note:

- 1.-The way the Lemoine varieties of 1910 and 1925 stand out.
- 2.-The high quality of many varieties we now possess in white, magenta and purple, compared to the rather few in violet and pink.
- 3.-That the dark-colored varieties do not seem to be as robust growers as the lighter colored varieties, nor do they grow as fast.

*Some of The Worthwhile French Hybrid Varieties*

Space will not allow a complete listing, and individual taste differs so, but here are a few that should fit the most exacting:

*White-Singles.* 'Vestale' for early and 'Mont Blanc' for late.

*White-Doubles.* 'Miss Ellen Willmott', a pure white, and 'Edith Cavell', a looser, creamy white.

*Violet-Singles.* These are comparative newcomers and not yet widely distributed. Single are 'De Miribel' and 'Cavour'.

*Violet-Doubles.* The outstanding 'Violetta' and 'Marechal Lannes'.

*Blues-Singles.* 'President Lincoln' introduced by the late John Dunbar of Rochester, New York, in 1924. 'Decaisne' and 'Maurice Barres' are not as blue but are two of the most satisfactory of all lilac novelties. 'Diplomate' and 'Firmament' are too new to rate but look very good. I personally think that 'Firmament' will be outstanding.

*Blue-Doubles.* 'Oliver de Serres', 'Emile Gentil' and 'Duc de Massa' are all very much worthwhile.

*Lilac-Singles.* 'Marengo' and 'Jacques Callot'.

*Lilac-Doubles.* 'President Fallieres' and the outstanding variety, 'Henri Martin', which is one of the peers of modern Lemoine introductions.

*Pink-Singles.* In single pinkish lilacs our modern breeders have not surpassed the work of the last century and 'Macrostachya' (1844) and 'Lucie Baltet' (1888) are still the best and practically alone.

*Pink-Doubles.* There are many newer excellent doubles, however, such as 'Virginite', 'Waldeck-Rousseau' and 'Mme. Antoine Buchner'.

*Reddish Tones* -- The reddish toned lilacs are among the most beautiful but are subject to fading.

*Singles.* 'Mme. F. Morel' (1892) and the outstanding 'Marechal Foch' (1924) are perhaps the most magnificent of all lilacs. They belong in every large or small garden. If you have room, plant 'Congo', 'Capitaine Baltet', 'Ruhm von Horstenstein'. They are all grand.

*Doubles.* 'Paul Thirion' is the best double of the group.

*Purple-Singles.* These are all good. 'Andenken an Ludwig Späth' is a popular German variety. Others are: 'Monge' (French), and 'Mrs. W.E. Marshall' (American), 'Mons. J. De Messemaeker' from Belgium can be absolutely breathtaking in its size and brilliance of color. 'Diderot' is sometimes a poor grower, yet in some gardens it will top all others in size of spike.

*Purple-Doubles.* There are not many. 'Adelaide Dunbar' is probably the best.

#### *Early Species Hybrids*

These are all known as the Giraldii group and should be better known. They come into bloom before the French hybrids and have a type of bloom entirely different and distinct from all the others.

'Buffon' is outstanding, having individual flowers like hyacinth blooms. Hence the common name of "hyacinthiflora". The color is an intense pink and the truss loose and graceful.

Another good one is 'Lamartine'.

For those who plan large plantings, they should avail themselves of the booklet "Lilacs for America" published by The Arthur Hoyt Scott Horticultural Foundation, Swarthmore, Penn., for the charge of \$1.00 - a worthwhile symposium.

### *Planting Instructions*

Plant your lilacs in any good garden loam that is well drained. They resent wet feet. Pack the soil firmly (emphasis on the firmly).

Lilacs should be placed in the open as far as possible; never in the shade or close to trees.

For best results plant 10 to 15 feet apart to allow for natural spread, air circulation, proper cultivation and admittance of sunshine.

Plant 3-5 feet apart for hedges; 6-10 feet for borders; and 10-15 feet for specimens.

Own rooted plants should be planted at approximately the same or slightly lower depth than they were in the nursery. Deep planting recommended by many growers should apply only to grafted stock.

When unpacking new plants, protect them from the wind, sun or frost until planted. It is good to submerge in containers of water or wrap in wet sacks. Failure of the above may result in very slow growth or death of an otherwise healthy bush.

### *Own Rooted Versus Grafted Plants*

From personal experience in growing lilacs, I favor own-rooted plants. Although slow in their growth they are long-lived and become more beautiful each year, whereas lilacs grafted on privet and planted deep sometimes get on their own roots; however in many cases they do not. Grafted plants tend to grow very rapidly the first two or three years, then they often begin to fail; blossoming ceases, the leaves wilt and turn yellowish. No amount of watering will bring the affected lilac back for the trouble (known as privet graft blight) is due to an insufficient root system. The plant is slowly dying of starvation.

### *Soil Condition*

Lilacs do not like a very sour soil. If your soil is too acid, work in a little hydrated lime, but do not overdo this or your bushes will show a stunted leaf and blossom. Soils differ so much in composition that it is impossible to recommend any specific amount of lime to use. The pH required for lilacs is 7.0 to 7.5. A pH test below 7.0 indicates acidity, above 7.0 indicates alkalinity. If you are in doubt, send a sample to your State Department of Agriculture for an analysis.

### *Fertilizing*

It is well to mulch the plant in the fall with a good manure, if available, and dig it in the spring, but not too deeply. Lilacs send out many small surface feeder roots that should be disturbed as little as possible when spading.

Every few years apply a good coat of bonemeal.

Curling and yellowing of the leaves is usually a sign of soil depletion. In this case apply a complete fertilizer. Select one that has a high phosphorous content in relation to nitrogen. Nitrogen induces too much wood. A proper balance would be: 4 per cent nitrogen; 16 per cent potash and 4 per cent phosphoric acid.

### *Cultivation*

After digging around each plant in the spring, the ground should be worked continually to keep the weeds down and the soil open. The more cultivation the better, but particularly in the spring months.

When cultivating, be careful not to dig deep enough to cut or mutilate roots, as this will cause the development of more suckers in addition to destroying the feeder roots.

### *First Year Growing Caution*

The newly planted lilac often acts as though it were going

to die, even after it has made a good start the first spring. The leaves suddenly stop growing, turn limp, and the bush looks as though it were dying. As a rule, there is no cause for alarm. Give the plant a good thorough soaking of water, then keep it well watered the balance of the season. The next spring remove any dead wood and your lilac will come along all right.

Remember that lilacs want to live and bloom for a hundred years and do not recover immediately from the shock of transplanting. Do not expect blooms, if any, true to color or size the first season.

### *Suckering*

Don't let your lilacs sucker too freely. When much growth appears at the base of own-rooted plants, remove all but a few strong stems. It is sometimes advisable to let an occasional new stem grow to take care of possible losses of old wood. On ownrooted stock it is well to remember that all suckers are typical of the parent plant in every way.

Grafted bushes should be watched after new growth starts, for the formation of suckers below the graft. These should be removed at once as they are apt to destroy an otherwise good bush.

### *Pruning*

This is usually not necessary at first unless the top is too heavy and thick for a weak root system. It prefers to be left alone while it struggles to become adjusted to the new surroundings. After about three years and each year thereafter, if you want large blooms on your French hybrids, you should start to prune out some of the old wood to within a foot or so from the ground. Strong new shoots will keep the bush rejuvenated. Pruning is best done when the leaves have fallen and full visibility may be had.

On grafted plants the main trunk must not be removed. To my way of thinking, this is one of the most serious faults with a grafted plant, for if any disaster should affect the main

trunk, your lilac bush is through for there is nothing to rejuvenate on.

Another very necessary cutting is done just after the flowers fade. It is then time to remove the would-be seed pods which are drawing most of the plant's strength. Clip off the blossom stem with care so as not to injure the new wood around it, for that will carry next year's display.

Heavy yearly pruning may be done to offset close planting. This makes for larger blooms but at a sacrifice of quantity of blooms.

It is, therefore, well to remember the necessity of proper pruning for the largest blooms are, at all times, produced on vigorous young wood. A bush, which due to lack of attention, becomes a tangled mass of twigs and branches, dead wood and suckers will not and cannot produce satisfactory flowers, nor will one that is held to some arbitrary height by lopping the ends off of long limbs.

#### *Pests*

Lilacs fortunately are not subject to many pests and diseases, if well cared for by proper cultivation, fertilization and removal of old, damaged and diseased wood.

Natural enemies, the worst of which are, in the order of their importance: borer, scale, powdery mildew (in extra damp seasons). Here are some brief notes to help you understand, detect, and combat them.

*Lilac borer.* A clear winged, wasp-like moth. Pupation takes place in spring, usually in May. Deposits eggs on roughened spots on the bark. The larvae on hatching enter the bark and feed on the inner sap wood, tunneling under the bark and sometimes nearly or completely girdling the limb. This cuts off the flow of sap, causing wilting of the foliage.

Infestation may be detected by a wet foamy deposit, at point

of entry and later by a deposit of chewings like sawdust.

Dig out with a wire or knife, or insert a small piece of cotton into the hole, soaked in carbon bisulphide. Then stop up the hole with grafting wax which is better than any other material.

*Scale.* Infestation may occur as with any fruit tree, etc. These may be killed by a dormant oil spray or lime and sulphur.

*Powdery Mildew,* a fungus disease, will be found only in an unusually damp, cool season. Use copper sulphate spray or powder.

*Leaf-tying Caterpillars.* These are common in the Pacific Northwest. Eggs are laid by a moth under the leaf surface. Upon hatching the larvae being to roll up the leaves, fastening them on the outside with threads of web. Here they remain until grown and finally let themselves down to earth by thread-like webs.

There may be three generations - one in April or May - one in August - one in September. The best prevention is constant cultivation and squeezing of curled leaves.

Don't be frightened by pests that may infest your lilacs, just keep awake.

#### *Things to Remember*

Lilacs are tough and stand much neglect and abuse, but even so, good gardeners will want to treat them well.

I beg of you, therefore, to give them what they like:

1. Good well-drained soil.
2. Full exposure to sun.
3. Plenty of space.
4. Yearly, liberal feedings.
5. Occasional liming of your soil if acid.
6. Remove all excessive suckering.
7. Cultivate well but not too deeply.

8. Cut off all faded blooms, just below the truss, immediately after flowering.
9. Remember that large blooms are at all times produced on vigorous young wood.
10. Avoid lopping off the ends of long limbs but prune only to keep the plant open and shapely.

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C O R R E C T I O N :

The ILS ANNUAL MEETING (1980 Convention) will take place on Friday, May 23 and Saturday, May 24 rather than the earlier dates which were indicated in the October '79 issue of the NEWSLETTER.

Plan now to attend two exquisite lilac collections in Medina and Mentor as a part of this important meeting-- details of the program are on the loose leaf sheet, enclosed with this issue. More details about preregistration, room reservation, and how to get there will follow.