



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.

Articles printed in this publication are the views and opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the editor or the *International Lilac Society*.

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A LILAC TREE THROUGH THE MISTS OF MEMORY

by George Kidd

One of the earliest and happiest recollections of my childhood is of the large, unkempt and spreading lilac tree or really huge bush outside our farmhouse door. Covering a large circle, its numerous strong trunks thrust haphazardly upward ten or twelve feet, surrounded at the bottom by a protective cushion of suckers and the whole capped on top by a spreading canopy of leaves and intermingled sunshine, flowers and scented breezes. The trunks, sturdy enough to support a small boy and his pet, small enough to climb with hands and feet and arching back, provided risky fun swinging from perch to perch. Then tiring of one place, we could navigate every few minutes to a different view of the lacy clouds, the busy birds, the cooing pigeons on the nearby roof, the farm animals grazing in the field below. That huge neglected lilac shrub, all bathed with soothing perfume, will always live in my memory as a favorite refuge.

The Ottawa area in Canada is well suited to the Syringa genus; in fact there are few flowering shrubs so well adapted to the long, cold, snowy winters and the hot summers. That it is not more extensively grown is perhaps because the above description - large, unkempt and spreading - is still widely held in the public mind. And while in times past this may have been accurate and perhaps even attractive to children, and in the country, the more suburban image of today's hybrid would make it more acceptable for our packaged settings.

The Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, under the direction of Mr. Trevor Cole, has the largest lilac collection in Eastern Ontario - as well as magnificent displays of other flowers and the Dominion Arboretum as well. It was here that Miss Isabel Preston made her successful crosses, and many *Prestonia* varieties. Numerous Japanese lilacs, are to be seen along the Driveways and Parkways, as well as at the residences of the Governor-General of Canada and of the Prime Minister. But, strangely, there are few private collections in the area where lilacs grow so well.

* * * * *

BITS OF WIT

A bird in hand is safer than one overhead.

Everything east of the San Andreas Fault will eventually plunge into the Atlantic Ocean.

Happiness is not a destination but a way of travelling.

If your child is bright, you probably believe in heredity.

LILACS GET BETTER

Dr. Donald Wyman, Jamaica Plain, Mass.

*Reprint

Lilacs have changed greatly since the common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) was brought to this country by early settlers probably before 1700. Seventy years later the first hybrid lilac was produced but still there were only purple and white flowers. Since that time, two dozen species have been introduced into America and well over 500 varieties.

At this time 530 different lilacs are growing in the collection of the Arnold Arboretum, 300 species and varieties being listed in the Plant Buyers Guide recently published by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. This is the most recent check list of what is currently being offered by American nurseries. So, in two and a half centuries of planting gardens in America, the number of varieties of lilac has jumped from two to over 500.

Flowers are larger, more fragrant, deeper in color as well as more diversified with several double flowered varieties available. This gives the modern gardener real opportunity to select plants of different color, habit and time of bloom. Lilacs start to bloom in early May and continue to late June, although the greatest number are in full bloom about the third week in May.

*Reprint The above dissertation was first published in HORTICULTURE Magazine (May 1959) and is herein reprinted with the express permission of the Editor of that publication.

Editor

Attempts have been made to select the 100 best lilacs, judged by their performance over many years and in many situations throughout the United States and Canada. When this list was compiled a few years ago, it was found that at least 75 of the current 100 best were introduced by Lemoine of Nancy, France.

It takes time for a lilac or any woody plant for that matter, to be grown widely enough to become popular. This is one of the reasons why the Lemoine varieties still head the list and this also is the reason for the popular assumption that good lilacs are French hybrids. Some are good but there are many others, originated in other countries that are just as good.

Our modern lilacs can now be classed in seven or eight color groups. One of the most outstanding in the blue to bluish grouping is 'President Lincoln' developed by the late John Dunbar of Rochester, New York, in 1924. At the head of the list of deep purple lilacs would be 'Andenken an Ludwig Spaeth' bred by the famous German nursery of Spaeth about 1883 and 'Mrs. W.E. Marshall' produced on the Havemeyer estate on Long Island, New York, in 1924. The best of the pinks would include 'Lucie Baltet' and 'Katherine Havemeyer' while top ranking whites are 'Vestale', 'Miss Ellen Willmott' and 'Mont Blanc'.

The increasingly popular group of late flowering lilacs originated by Miss Isabella Preston at Ottawa, Canada and named the Preston Hybrids in her honor, have considerable red and pink in the flowers. They bloom a week or so after the common lilacs and are extremely hardy. The variety 'Isabella' is one of the best.

The last of all the lilacs to bloom is the Japanese tree lilac (*Syringa reticulata*) which is really a tree with cherry-like bark. Its large terminal flower clusters of creamy white appear in mid-June.

Not all of our modern lilacs are upright shrubs. Low and mounded, almost twice as broad as it is high is *Syringa microphylla* 'Superba', originated in the Chenault Nurseries in France in 1934 and brought to this country and the Arnold Arboretum in 1939. The flowers are deep pink, opening at the same time as those of the common lilac.

Sometimes lilacs fail to bloom when Perfect blooms are normally expected only every other year, for this is the habit of many woody plants. However, several things can be done to obtain better blooming annually:

1. Don't starve your lilacs. Apply fertilizer and occasionally limestone.
2. Cut out a majority of the suckers at the base of the plant. Leave enough to supply renewal flowering branches as older ones are removed. Leave only healthy and sturdy branches.
3. Remove dead flower clusters, thus preventing seed formation. If this is done as soon as the blossoms have faded-fine. But if you wait for several weeks, removal of the seed clusters after they have formed probably does little to aid flowering.

The lilac story continues year by year. During the last few years a widely advertised yellow lilac was introduced which I thought at first was merely a creamy white. This variety, now called 'Primrose' is certainly not a dark yellow but has possibilities. The color of the flowers is distinctly yellow- certainly easily distinguishable from white.

ALBERT LUMLEY, 78,
TEACHER, POLITICIAN AND LILAC LOVER

On Tuesday March 24, 1981, Albert E. Lumley, 78, of 24 Harkness Road, Amherst, Mass., parted the soul from his body.

Beside being a great lilac enthusiast and owner of a large, renowned lilac collection, he was a professor of physical education at Amherst College, active politician at the local and state level and in most recent years associated with Town & Country Realtors.

Born in Detroit, he attended Utica, Mich., schools, graduated in 1925 from Eastern Michigan University, and received his masters degree from Oberlin (Ohio) College in 1938.

An army major in World War II, he was in charge of rehabilitating wounded servicemen in the Pacific, and commanding officer of a hospital in Manila.

He leaves his wife, the former Mabel Brinn; a son, two sisters and a grandson.