



Photo of Montreal Botanic Gardens

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*Ohio MGV,  
 Growing and Enjoying Lilacs (Syringa):  
 The Queen of Flowering Shrubs*

### “Lilacs” Contents

- Key Facts
- Types of Lilacs
- Flower Forms & Colors
- Growing Conditions & Maintenance
- Making More Lilacs, Pruning
- Cut Lilac Flowers, Perfume, Fragrance
- Public Collections & Festivals to Visit
- Well-Known Lilacs



### Key Facts

## LILACS (*Syringa*)

- 57 flowering shrub genera in the world. Lilacs are one of them.
- Genus of 15 natural (and 10 hybrid) species in the Olive family (Oleaceae).
- Found in temperate woodlands and scrub of hilly or mountain areas.
  - Thirteen from East Asia
  - Two from Eastern Europe: the common *Ilac s. vulgaris*, and the late *Ilac s. josikaea* (endangered).

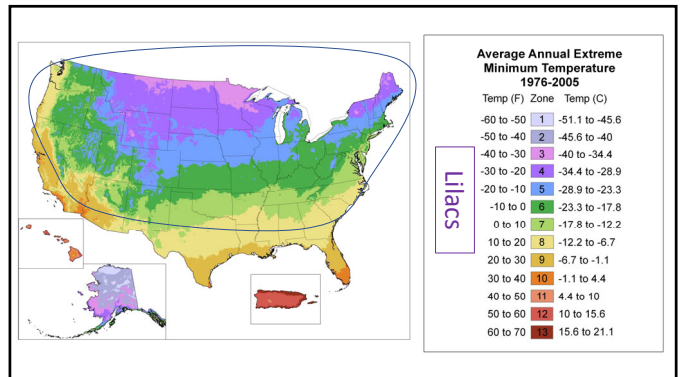
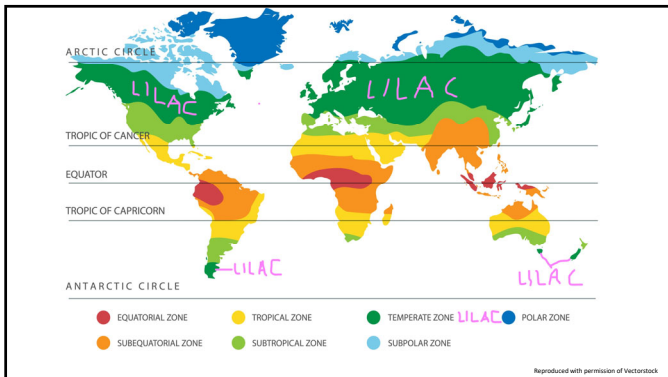


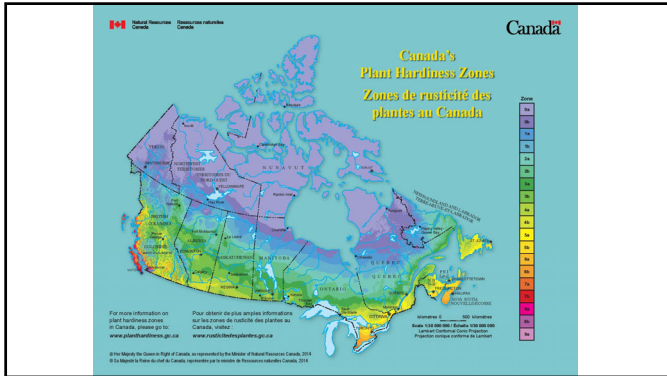
### Key Facts

## LILACS (*Syringa*)

- Lilacs are not native to North America (subject to new diseases, insects)
- Import into the USA forbidden, limited exception for Canada.
- Foreign cultivars before 1740. Since then, a few slowly came from Canada.
- Lilacs take 4-5 years to flower.







### Types of Lilacs

- 4 Series: Common (Syringa), Littleleaf (Pubescens), Late (Villosae), Tree (Ligustrina)
- (1) Common species: vulgaris, xhyacinthiflora, xchinensis, xpersica
- (2) Littleleaf species: pubescens, patula, microphylla
- (3) Late species: josikaea, komarowii, tomentella, xprestoniae, xjosiflexa
- (4) Tree species: reticulata, pekinensis
- LILAC SERIES CAN'T INTERBREED OR HYBRIDIZE
- LILACS DON'T NEED CROSS-POLLINATION
- LILACS NOT INVASIVE (ugly sharp fruit) AND NOT NATIVE TO USA

### Leaf Comparisons of the Four Lilac Series

Left to Right:  
 (1) Common Lilac and  
 (2) Littleleaf Hairy Lilacs (patula, pubescens, microphylla)

Left to Right:  
 (3) Late Lilac and  
 (4) Tree Lilacs (Japanese, Amur, Peking)

### 1. Series *Syringa* (Common Lilac)

- S. oblata* (Early lilac)
- S. vulgaris* (Common lilac)

Hybrids:


- S. xhyacinthiflora* (*S. oblata* x *S. vulgaris*) (Hyacinth early lilac)
- S. xchinensis* (*S. protolaciniata* x *S. vulgaris*) (Rouen or Chinese lilac)
- S. xpersica* (Persian lilac)
- S. xlaciniata* (*S. protolaciniata* x ?) (Lancinate lilac)

### (1) Common Series: *S. Oblata* (Early Lilac)

- From China; rare in North America.
- Comes in purple, pink and white colors.
- Large flowers, earliest season April-May bloom.
- Reddish leaf edges with some fall color
- Great lilac fragrance!
- Crossed with common lilac for earlier bloom and warm-weather tolerance.


### (1) Common Series: *S. vulgaris*

- The common lilac in stores.
- Comes in lilac and white colors.
- Native to Eastern Europe.
- Brought to USA by early settlers 1700's.
- Largest flowers, mid-season May bloom.
- Great lilac fragrance!



**(1) Common Series:**  
*S. vulgaris* Hybrids

- Over 1500 cultivars
- 7 official flower colors
- 11 bud colors



**(1) Common Series:**  
*S. x hyacinthiflora*

- Oblata x vulgaris; all are named cultivars.
- Normal vulgaris-type leaf; dark purple hints when young and in fall.
- All seven Wisteria colors.
- Great fragrance.
- Many singles and doubles; blooms earlier than vulgaris.

Top left clockwise:  
'Sweetheart', 'Declaration', 'Pocahontas', 'Sister Justina', 'Doctor Chadwick', 'Esther Staley'



**(1) Common Series:**  
*S. x chinensis*

- Protolaciniata x vulgaris (natural, we think)
- Small oblong leaf.
- Color white (rare) to pink to lilac.
- Great fragrance.
- Only one, double form flower cultivar ('Duplex').
- Early blooming



**(1) Common Series:**  
*S. x persica*

- "Persian Lilac"
- Uncertain parentage; appears 1700.
- Small chinensis-like leaf.
- 4 colors: white, pink, lilac, violet.
- Great fragrance.
- Single flower form only, sterile.



**(1) Common Series:**  
*S. x laciniata*

- From China, rare in North America.
- Comes in pink and purple colors.
- Unusual pinnately compound leaves.
- Smaller flowers and panicles.
- Great lilac fragrance!

**2. Series *Pubescentes* (Hairy or Littleleaf Lilac)**

*S. pubescens*  
subsp. *microphylla*  
subsp. *patula*  
subsp. *pubescens*



*microphylla*      *pubescens*      *patula*      *microphylla*

- Korean littleleaf lilac.
- Subspecies *pubescens*, *microphylla*, and *patula*.
- Bloom at end of and after common lilac.
- 3 colors: white, pink, rare purple.
- Most are smaller in height.
- Great lilac fragrance.

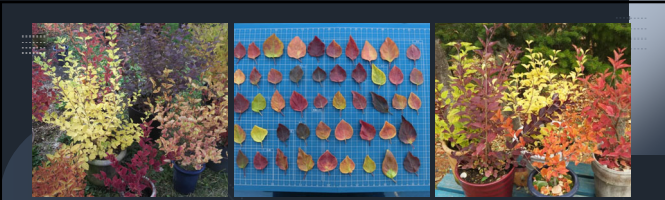
(2) Littleleaf Series:  
*S. pubescens*

(2) Littleleaf Series:  
*S. pubescens*,  
*patula*, *microphylla*

- Many nice cultivars, especially reblooming.
- Many others are subspecies crosses.
- Nice Fall color of leaves.
- 3 colors: white, pink, purple
- Small leaves and florets



'George Eastman' *S. microphylla*  
'Miss Kim' *S. patula*  
'Pallidin' *S. pubescens*  
'Hers' *S. microphylla*



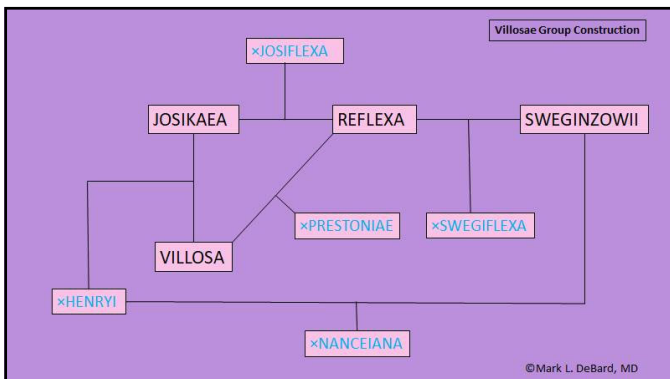
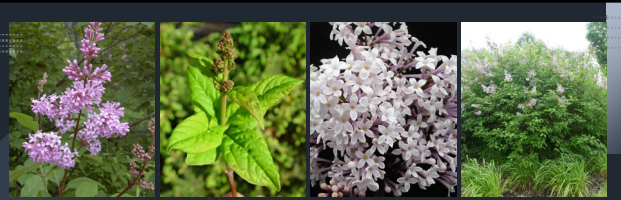
(2) Littleleaf Series:  
*S. pubescens*

- Fall leaf color of Series Pubescentes.
- Japanese cultivars by Hideo Ihara.
- Not seen in other Series

### 3. Series Villosae (Late Lilac)

*S. josikaea* (Hungarian lilac)  
*S. komarowii* (Nodding lilac)  
    subsp. *reflexa*  
*S. villosa* (Late lilac)  
*S. tomentella* (Woolly or Felty lilac)  
    subsp. *sweginzowii*

Hybrids (Villosae Group):  
*S. xprestoniae* (*S. reflexa* × *S. villosa*)  
*S. xjosiflexa* (*S. josikaea* × *S. reflexa*)  
*S. xswegiflexa* (*S. reflexa* × *S. sweginzowii*)  
*S. xhenryi* (*S. josikaea* × *S. villosa*)  
*S. xnanceiana* (*S. xhenryi* × *S. sweginzowii*)

(3) Late Series:  
*S. josikaea*

- Late blooming, after the common lilacs and before the tree lilacs.
- Color white to pink.
- Longer, rougher leaves than the other Series.
- Spicy fragrance.
- Endangered, Ukraine & Romania tiny native habitat only
- Parent of 2 hybrids (*josiflexa*, *henryi*)



(3) Late Series:  
*S. komarowii*

- Two subspecies, *komarowii* and *reflexa*.
- Late blooming, after the common lilacs and before the tree lilacs.
- Color: white, pink, rare others.
- Longer, rougher leaves than the other Series.
- Spicy fragrance.
- From China only, rare in North America.
- Parent of 3 hybrids (*prestoniae*, *josiflexa*, *swegiflexa*)



(3) Late Series:  
*S. villosa*

- Late blooming, after common, littleleaf lilacs, before tree lilacs.
- Color white to pink.
- Longer, rougher leaves than the other Series.
- Spicy fragrance.
- From China, rare in North America, has a subspecies *S. wolfii*.
- Parent of two hybrids (*prestoniae*, *henryi*)



(3) Late Series:  
*S. sweginzowii*

- Late blooming, after common, littleleaf lilacs, before tree lilacs.
- Color white to pink.
- Longer, rougher leaves than the other Series.
- Spicy fragrance.
- Actually a subspecies of *S. tomentella*, parent of two hybrids (*swegiflexa*, *nanceiana*)




(3) Late Series:  
*S. xprestoniae*

- Most famous late hybrids from Isabella Preston of Canada between 1928-1953; others since
- A cross of *S. villosa* x *S. reflexa*
- Colors: white, pink, magenta, purple, lilac, violet.
- Longer, rougher leaves than the other Series.
- Spicy fragrance.

## Series *Ligustrina* (Tree Lilac)

- S. reticulata*
- subsp. *reticulata* (Japanese tree lilac)
- subsp. *amurensis* (Amur tree lilac)
- S. pekinensis* (Peking tree lilac)



(4) Tree Series:  
*S. reticulata*

- Japanese or tree lilacs.
- Two subspecies of *reticulata* and *amurensis* (Manchurian or Amur lilac).
- Last to bloom of all lilacs.
- Colors: white with yellow buds.
- Cultivars with better tree form and flowers, e.g. 'Ivory Silk'



### (4) Tree Series: *S. pekinensis*

- Chinese tree lilac.
- Last to bloom of all lilacs.
- Colors limited to white and yellow.
- Cultivars with better tree form and flowers,
  - e.g. 'Beijing Gold'.
- Smaller than reticulata, cherry tree-like smooth, peeling bark.



### Flower Forms: Single, Double, Multipetal

- double only with common lilac (*vulgaris*) (and anything it is crossed with)

I-White	II-Pink	III-Red	IV-Orange	V-Yellow	VI-Green	VII-Cyan	VIII-Blue	IX-Violet	X-Purple	XI-Magenta
255,255,255	250,195,205	190,60,70	250,175,130	245,210,130	75,210,165	150,225,225	155,200,250	200,185,245	230,185,245	245,130,205

11 LCS Bud Colors




Wister Color	I White	II Violet	III Blue & Bluish	IV Lilac	V Pink & Pinkish	VI Magenta	VII Purple
RGB Code	255,255,255	201,186,248	153,136,248	236,158,225	248,195,206	244,131,205	228,185,289

7 Wister Flower Colors

### Bud and Flower Color

- Colors
  - 11 LCS bud colors
  - 7 Wister flower colors

### Growing Conditions

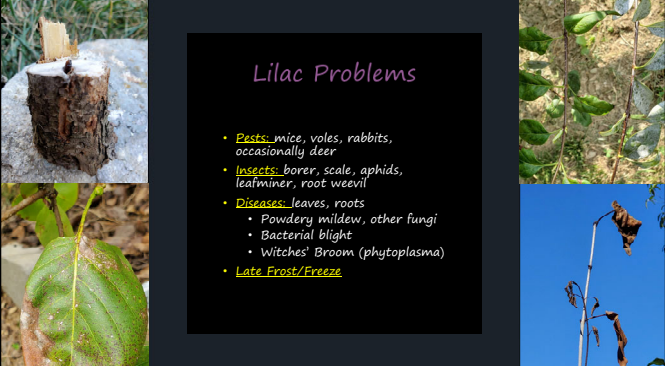


- What do Lilacs Need?
  - Full sun—6+ hours/day
  - Neutral to alkaline soil (pH 6.5–8.0)
  - Good drainage—no “wet feet”



### Maintenance: what they like:

- Pruning to height once per year
- Pruning within 2 weeks of flowers dying
- 5–10–5 fertilizer every 2–3 years (maybe)
- Grass and weed-free base with mulch
  - 3 foot diameter minimum
- Planting 8 feet apart for hedge
- Planting 12 feet apart for individuals
- Reduce maintenance with compact/dwarfs



### Lilac Problems

- Pests: mice, voles, rabbits, occasionally deer
- Insects: borer, scale, aphids, leafminer, root weevil
- Diseases: leaves, roots
  - Powdery mildew, other fungi
  - Bacterial blight
  - Witches' Broom (phytoplasma)
- Late Frost/Freeze

## Making More Lilacs

### Cuttings

### Suckers (offshoots)

### Grafting


### Cuttings

- Softwood spring green growth (no brown bark)
- 4-6 inches length
- 2-4 leaves at tip, strip others
- Dip ends in growth hormone (IBA, 0.8%)
- Stick 1-2-inch deep in rooting medium
  - Pure coarse sand OR
  - 1:1 Sand + potting soil, perlite, or peat
- Keep leaves constantly moist and humid
  - Misting or fogging system
- Wait 1-3 months, check for roots



### Suckers (Offshoots)

- Suckers occur naturally in the Common Lilacs
  - Rare in other lilac series
- Spring or Fall only
- Dig around sucker, confirm connection to mother plant
- Cut the root connection near mother plant
- Dig up sucker with as many roots as possible
  - Could wait for 6-12 months for it to make more roots before potting
- Plant in potting soil and pot, water often first one year.




### Grafting

- Use rootstock in same Genus (Oleaceae, Olives)
  - Privet, Ash, Forsythia, all Lilac Series (1<sup>st</sup> 3 not long-term)
- Pencil size base is best
  - Can be larger with side-grafting
- Desired lilac is called a SCION
- In mid-winter (January), cut 4-6-inch scion with 1-3 buds
- Cut ends to fit into each other
  - A learned skill
- Tape or rubber band in place, seal with wax or wax tape
- Wait 1-2 months to see if new growth sprouts
- Expose graft union after 6-12 months




### Pruning

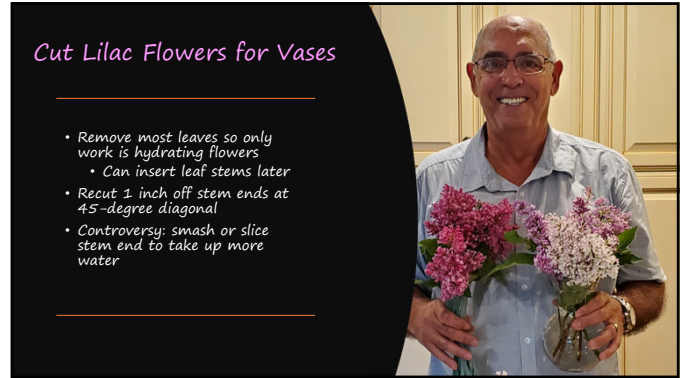
- None NECESSARY; will grow to natural size, flower panicles will be higher on bush
- First 2 years: prune central stem for more branching
- After 5 years: prune to reaching height of arm
- Prune flower panicles only within 2 weeks of finished bloom
- Rejuvenation pruning for common and littleleaf lilacs:
  - 1/3 of largest stems (over 2 inches diameter) each year.
- Late and tree lilacs usually don't sucker; no thinning out



### Sizes

- Tree Ligustrae:
  - Treeform: 6-12 feet
  - Reticulata (Japanese): 30-50 feet
  - Amurensis (Amur): 10-25 feet
  - Pekinensis (Chinese): 20-30 feet
- Common Syringa:
  - Normal: 10-20 feet
  - Compact: 6-8 feet
  - Dwarf: 4-6 feet
- Littleleaf Pubescentes:
  - Normal: 4-7 feet
  - Compact: 2-4 feet
- Late Villosae:
  - Common: 10-20 feet
  - Compact 5-10 feet







**Local Ohio Public Lilac Collections**

- Holden Arboretum, Cleveland: 137 cultivars, 212 plants
- Rowe Arboretum, Cincy: 87 taxa (named cultivars plus species plants)
- Dawes Arboretum, Newark: 50 taxa
  - 15 mature tree lilacs
- Mt. Airy Arboretum, Cincy: 50 taxa

DeBard Lilac Terraces: 171 cultivars

**Where To Get Lilacs?**

- No central source in USA, unlike Russia; Private Nurseries only
- Hope Springs Nursery
- Great Garden Plants
- Nature Hills Nursery
- Jung Seed Nursery
- Coldwater Pond Nursery
- Fox Hill Lilacs
- White Flower Farm
- Spring Hill Nursery
- McKay Nursery Company
- Grimm's Gardens
- Bluestone Perennials
- Wayside Gardens

**USA Festivals**

- Rochester Lilac Festival, Rochester, NY
- Lilac Sunday, Arnold Arboretum, Boston
- Lilac Museum Festival, Saint Georges, Quebec
- Lilac Days, Klager Gardens, Woodland, WA
- Lilac Time, Lombard, IL
- Mackinac Island Lilac Festival, MI
- Spokane Lilac Festival, Spokane, WA
- Taos Lilac Festival, Taos, NM

Background photo: Seppori Park, Japan, Yoshitaka Morita

**The Great Multipetaled Lilac: 'Rochester'**

- Lilacs have 4 petals per floret on each panicle or inflorescence
- 5 or more is called "radial doubling" and is rare and a sign of good luck
- Known record is 28 petals
  - Until this year
- 'Rochester' has many hybrids (next 3 slides)

'Rochester' by Linda Blackman

**The new Multipetaling Record: 58 Petals!**

- On June 4, 2020, a floret from 'Souvenir d'Alice Harding' in Moscow, Russia was found with 58 petals (in an already double floret)

All Photos: Tatyana Polyakova



Well-Known Lilacs



Well-Known Lilacs

Register of Cultivar Names

New 2021 book in print of the online Registry  
 First print edition in 20 years (no pictures)  
 3,561 listings from around the world  
 2,532 unique cultivars, about 1800 still extant  
Hardcover ISBN: 9781736293515 for \$35  
Paperback ISBN: 9781736293508 for \$25

ILS Lilac Photo & Color Database

Online ILS site for members only  
 1487 cultivars and taxons  
 10,377 photos  
 \$40 USB flash drive non-members

Want to know more?

<https://www.InternationalLilacSociety.org>

Or Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/106502479685645/>