

Lilacs at the Arnold Arboretum

Lilacs were among the first cultivated plants grown at the Arnold Arboretum. On Bussey Hill, look for remnants of a lilac hedge planted in the mid-19th century by Arboretum benefactor, Benjamin Bussey. The oldest lilac on record in this collection is a *Syringa reticulata* (Japanese tree lilac) from 1876.

The Arnold Arboretum's lilac collection has over 375 plants of about 175 different kinds. Many are cultivars, or cultivated varieties, selected for horticultural merits like flower size and color. Others are the parents of many of today's hybrids. Lilacs are in the olive family; other relatives growing on Bussey Hill include ash trees and forsythia.

Although not a native plant, lilacs have been grown in North America since colonial times. Today, they enrich our landscape with color and fragrance for as long as five weeks each spring. Thousands gather at the Arboretum every May for Lilac Sunday, to enjoy this popular plant.

1. *Syringa vulgaris* 'St. Margaret'

'St. Margaret' was introduced in 1957 by Mary E. Blacklock in association with Rowancroft Gardens of Ontario, Canada. The shrub's blooms are double white, and the plant is considered to be one of the finest available in this color category.

2. *Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin'

Although native to China, this species is known as dwarf Korean lilac. The diminutive size, small flowers, and rounded habit give this cultivar a dainty appearance, however the plant is robust and grows with vigor. Flowers are prolific, fragrant, and pale pink to light lavender. Not your typical lilac, this plant could be ideal for a small garden and does not require much pruning.

3. *Syringa reticulata*

The Japanese tree lilac, *Syringa reticulata*, is a small tree with large clusters of ivory-colored blossoms. One of the last lilacs to bloom, the Japanese tree lilac flowers two weeks after the common lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*. This specimen is the oldest lilac in our collection and was started from seed brought from Japan in 1876.

4. *Syringa oblata* var. *dilatata* 'Cheyenne'

The species is native to Korea and nearby regions of China; 'Cheyenne' was introduced by the USDA from seeds collected in China. In color and fragrance, the abundant blooms embody the ideal lilac. This species flowers as much as a week or more before the common lilac. The plant offers fall interest as well, when some leaves turn a lovely shade of maroon.

5. *Syringa x chinensis* 'Lilac Sunday'

This 1997 introduction by the Arnold Arboretum was grown by plant propagator Jack Alexander from seed supplied by the Beijing Botanical Garden. This plant produces abundant, pale purple, fragrant flowers that are borne in clusters at the tips and along the sides of its branches.

6. *Syringa x hyacinthiflora* 'Blanche Sweet'

Introduced by Father John Fiala in 1981, 'Blanche Sweet' has a single, pale blue flower that is quite fragrant. The shrub reaches about 8 feet in height at maturity, and its foliage is resistant to powdery mildew. This cultivar was named for the silent film actress, Blanche Sweet.

7. *Syringa* 'MORjos 060F' (Josee)

This cultivar produces abundant, single, lilac to pinkish flowers in the spring. Often praised for blooming throughout the summer, this cultivar's sporadic late-season blooms never equal its profuse spring landscape display, but do offer sufficient flowers to cut for floral arrangements.

8. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Hulda'

This common lilac cultivar was introduced in Washington State in 1929, but was not readily available for over half a century. Recently rediscovered, this spectacular plant produces single, purple to dark purple flowers and displays handsome foliage throughout season, with almost no powdery mildew.

9. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Krasavitsa Moskv'

Introduced by Russian hybridizer Leonid Kolesnikov in 1947, the cultivar name translates as "Beauty of Moscow." Today this tall, upright cultivar is quite popular and widely available. Attractive buds are pink with an opalescent sheen, opening to double, white, fragrant flowers. Its foliage is generally resistant to powdery mildew.

10. *Syringa* 'Bailbelle' (Tinkerbelle)

This interspecific hybrid was introduced by Bailey Nursery in 1999 as part of the Fairytale® Series. A small-leaved, slow-growing shrub, it will reach a height and spread of about 5-6 feet. Blossoms start out as wine-red buds and develop into small, distinctive, single pink flowers with a spicy fragrance.

11. *Syringa vulgaris* 'President Lincoln'

This cultivar was introduced in 1916 by John Dunbar (1859-1927), assistant superintendent of parks and founder of the Highland Park lilac collection in Rochester, NY. 'President Lincoln' has a single medium blue flower, which is quite fragrant. The buds are purplish-black when tightly closed.

12. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Frederick Law Olmsted'

Introduced in 1987, 'Frederick Law Olmsted' is named for America's first landscape architect and the co-designer of the Arnold Arboretum. A vigorous grower, the shrub can reach 8 feet in height yet remains relatively compact, with a rounded habit. The abundant single white flowers release a notable fragrance.

13. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Sarah Sands'

This fragrant beauty displays single, dark purple florets. The plant habit tends to be upright with a height of less than 12 feet. Truly one of the best of the dark purples, it was introduced in 1943 by Theodore Havemeyer, lilac hybridizer from Long Island, NY.

14. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Atheline Wilbur'

The fragrant double flowers of 'Atheline Wilbur' make this cultivar a favorite of those who know lilacs. Hybridized by Father John Fiala, the breeder of some of our better known lilacs, 'Atheline Wilbur' is striking in its color display, with bold darker unopened buds and lighter open flowers appearing at the same time. The shades of color vary from deep rosy-lavender to pale orchid tones.

15. *Syringa x hyacinthiflora* 'Asessippi'

'Asessippi', introduced in 1932, was one of the first hybrids released by F.L. Skinner. This early flowering lilac produces abundant blooms uniformly over the entire plant, even on the lower branches. The fragrant flowers are a deep lilac color. Its attractive, rounded habit and strong disease resistance make 'Asessippi' a wonderful choice of lilac.

16. *Syringa* 'Purple Haze'

'Purple Haze' was introduced in 2005 by Arnold Arboretum plant propagator Jack Alexander. The specimen on the tour is the original plant of this cultivar, created by crossing *Syringa oblata* and *Syringa protolaciniata*. As a sterile hybrid, this plant does not need to be dead-headed to encourage next year's blossoms. 'Purple Haze' is a large shrub bearing fragrant, pale purple flowers.

17. *Syringa protolaciniata* 'Kabul'

Known as the cut-leaf or fern-leaf lilac because of its unusual, finely cut leaves, *S. protolaciniata*, commonly offered as *S. laciniata* or *S. afghanica*, will develop into a rounded shrub with tall, violet flowers that bloom mid-season. 'Kabul,' named by P.S. Green for the city of Kabul, Afghanistan, spreads as wide as it grows tall (5-6 feet), making it an interesting informal hedge.

18. *Syringa pinnatifolia*

This Chinese native was first discovered by plant explorer Ernest Henry Wilson in the mountains of Sichuan province in 1904. This plant blooms early in the season, producing small panicles of white flowers. Unique among lilacs, this species has pinnately compound leaves, meaning that each leaf is actually composed of many small leaflets.

19. *Syringa x hyacinthiflora* 'Nokomis'

This hardy cultivar was introduced by F.L. Skinner in 1934. Nokomis was the grandmother of Hiawatha, the Native American subject of a famous Longfellow poem. The cultivar 'Nokomis' has fragrant, single, lilac-colored flowers that bloom slightly before the common lilac. The shrub has a dense, mounding habit and reaches 10-12 feet in height and width.

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