

LILACS

in the Botanical Garden

A Guide to the
Newly-Restored Lilac Garden



Outstanding Lilacs in the Botanical Garden

How to choose your favorite lilac? Color? Fragrance? Time of bloom: early, late? But most of all, how does it grow in your garden? Some of our favorites are listed below.

BED	NAME	HABIT	COLOR
1	'Edith Clavell'	double	white
1	'Miss Kim'	single	lavender
1	'Alphonse Lavallee'	double	lilac
2	'Arch McKean'	single	magenta
2,3	'President Lincoln'	single	blue
3,9	'S. reticulata'	tree lilac	
4	'Dwight D. Eisenhower'	single	blue
5	'Villars'	single	lilac
6	'Volcan'	single	purple
6,7	'Hers'	single	lavender
8	'Beauty of Moscow'	single	white/pinkish
10	'Assessippi'	single	lilac
11	'Sensation'	single	bicolor
12	'Capitaine Perrault'	double	pink

Please Be Careful!

Sometimes we forget that the NJBG gardens belong to everyone; we bend branches too far to smell the lilacs and they break, or we step over the bed border and damage underplantings. Picking of any branches, flowers, or plants is prohibited by the regulations of the State of New Jersey



The NJBG/Skylands Association was founded in 1976 to help the State of New Jersey preserve and restore the gardens and Manor House, and to develop programs for public education and enjoyment throughout the year.

NJBG receives no funding from the State of NJ or on-premises operators.

Volunteers are always needed to help in the garden and with special projects.

For more information and a membership brochure, please call:

973-962-9534

or write to:

NJBG • P. O. Box 302 • Ringwood, NJ 07456



njbg.org

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New Jersey State Botanical Garden

Ringwood State Park
Morris Road • Ringwood, NJ

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History of the NJBG Lilac Garden

C. M. Lewis planted approximately 200 lilacs in the 1920s in 14 beds plus a few scattered plants. During the intervening years, the shrubs have been sufficiently pruned and the beds weeded so that today we have a magnificent collection.



However, in the past 90 years the system used to identify the various cultivars has become impractical to use. In 2000, we began the NJBG Lilac Restoration Project with four major goals:

1. Identification and labeling of cultivars,
2. Pruning to rejuvenate the shrubs and bring the flowers to where they can be seen and smelled,
3. Addition of new varieties,
4. Planting muscari (grape hyacinths) along the bed borders to provide an additional level of color at bloom time.



In 2003 the NJBG/Skylands Association placed an octagonal bench around a tree lilac so visitors can sit comfortably while enjoying the lilacs.



Best Time To See Our Lilacs In Bloom

The various species and cultivars (cultivated varieties) bloom for about eight weeks beginning in late April. Peak flower time is around Mothers' Day.



The blooming sequence at NJBG is *S. hyacinthiflora*, *S. vulgaris*, *S. prestoniae* and finally the tree lilacs (*S. reticulata* and *S. pekinensis*).



Care of Lilacs

Lilacs need 5 to 6 hours a day of sun for flowering. Good air circulation reduces, but does not eliminate, powdery mildew. Good drainage and a soil pH of about 6.5 keep lilacs most happy. Established plants do not need to be watered. Mulch helps to retain soil moisture and prevent weed growth. Remove weeds as lilacs do not compete well with them. Keep mulch several inches from the base of all trees or shrubs.

Deadheading right after bloom is not essential but may increase the quantity of flowers next year. There is no need to deadhead lilacs that do not set seed (*S. chinensis* and double forms of *S. vulgaris*).

History of Cultivated Lilacs

Syringa vulgaris, the common lilac, and most frequently seen species, originated in the Balkans. From there they were taken to the gardens in Istanbul, then to western Europe (Vienna in 1563) and to Paris seven years later. Lilacs flower best in cold climates as cold is needed to set flower buds.

For at least 200 years, growers have been hybridizing lilacs, selecting and naming the "best." French hybridizers of *S. vulgaris* produced "French lilacs." Lilac enthusiasts in Russia produced "Russian lilacs." The names of cultivated varieties of lilacs are registered with the International Lilac Society to prevent duplication. Beware when purchasing lilacs as we have seen them mislabeled. Select multistemmed plants and try to get them on their own roots (not grafted).

Other species of lilac (*S. lacinata*, *S. patula*, *S. pubescens*, *S. reticulata*, *S. microphylla*, *S. meyeri*) have their origin in Asia. They have been used extensively in hybridizing and are gradually becoming more readily available.

Lilac Labels

We have attempted to identify the cultivated varieties of lilac in our garden. When successful, we have attached plastic tags identifying the species, the cultivar name, flower type and color, hybridizer, and the year the variety was introduced.

The shrubs are tagged with numbers to help in identification and locating plants. We have maps showing the location of each plant in each bed.

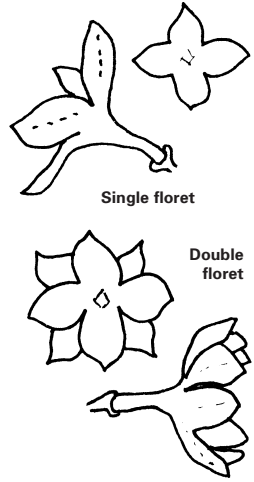
There are twelve beds in the main lilac garden, and two rows of lilacs to the east of the Carriage House Visitor Center. The white plastic tags can be used to identify the beds as, for example, all numbers in bed 1 begin with 1, in bed 2 they begin with 2.

Learning About Lilacs

Contact the International Lilac Society (on the web at <http://lilacs.freesevers.com>), read *Lilacs: The Genus Syringa* by Fr. John L. Fiala or *Lilacs for the Garden* by Jennifer Bennet.

Lilac Identification

The various species and cultivars of lilac are distinguished from each other by shape and size of plant; leaf shape, size, hairiness, and petiole (stem) length; bark color and pattern; cluster size and shape; flower color (white, violet, blue, lilac, pink, magenta, purple); floret shape and size, single or double, tube length; fragrance; hardiness. It is the pattern, or constellation, of these features that distinguishes each taxon, not one single attribute. Identification of lilac cultivars is difficult and experts often disagree.



Lilac Diseases

The single most common problem of lilacs is mildew. As it occurs well after the time of bloom and does not harm the plant, there is no need to treat the condition. Lilac borers can cause dieback of entire branches. Unfortunately, the damage is done to the stem before the problem is identified. Leaf curl may be due to atmospheric pollution. Nevertheless, cut out dead and diseased branches.

Pruning Lilacs

Lilacs are long-lived shrubs. There are plantings in the United States from the 1650s and 1750s. Sometimes the only evidence that a piece of land was once the site of someone's home is a lilac marking what was once the location of the front door. These lilacs continue to grow and bloom untended, unwatered, unpruned.

However, pruning lilacs gives a more pleasing shape to the plant and keeps it from growing too tall for us to smell the flowers. Lilacs can be pruned at any time but it is best done after flowering to avoid loss of bloom and before the end of June to avoid borer invasion. If the cuts are made after July 4, flower buds are unlikely to form below the cut.

To rejuvenate a lilac, use a multiyear approach removing no more than one-third of the old trunks each year. Cut near the base of the plant. Do not "top" the lilacs. Of course damaged, diseased, or rubbing stems should be pruned out immediately. Leave some of the suckers (those as thick as a pencil) to replace the cut out stems.

Join the NJBG Lilac Restoration Project Volunteers
973-962-9534 www.njbg.org