THE ARBORETUM LILACS IN THEIR ORDER OF BLOOM

There are at least five full weeks of lilac blooms at the Arnold Arboretum. This is not known to every Arboretum visitor, since to the majority, lilacs bloom only during a ten-day period in late May. It is true that the largest display comes at this time, since three fourths of the lilac collection consists of Syringa vulgaris varieties. But it is still true that there is a continuous display of lilac blooms for a five-week period at least, and sometimes this is extended for another week or two if weather conditions remain favorable.

When some of the species are compared with the many beautiful varieties of S.vulgaris, they are found lacking in color, fragrance and size; but when the S.vulgaris varieties are not in flower for comparison, these species and their comparatively few varieties are of interest and contain several plants well worth including in many garden plantings. The Bulletin of Popular Information (May 20, 1936, Series 4 Vol. IV No. 8) contained considerable information concerning the care of lilacs, their history and some of the outstanding varieties of S.vulgaris, so that it is unnecessary to repeat that information here. However, it may be of interest to note the sequence in which these plants normally bloom.

The Arboretum lilacs are listed according to the times at which they start to bloom. Frequently they may remain in bloom sufficiently long so that they can be used ornamentally with lilacs in another group. Thus, S.chinensis and S.persica come into bloom after the S. vulgaris varieties have reached their peak, but still can be used at the same time effectively. As is the case with the sequence of bloom of other ornamental trees and shrubs, weather conditions may alter the dates. However, after comparing the records based on the lilac collection at the Arnold Arboretum for several years, we find that the following groups of species and their varieties bloom together.
SEQUENCE OF BLOOM

1. Blooming about May 10
   Syringa oblata
   " " affinis
   " " dilatata
   " " giraldi

2. Blooming about May 15
   ×Syringa hyacinthiflora (*S. oblata × S. vulgaris*)
   " " Berryer
   " " Buffon
   " " Catinat
   " " Claude Bernard
   " " Descartes
   " " Louvois
   " " Mirabeau
   " " Montesquieu
   " " Necker
   " " Pascal
   " " Turgot
   " " Vauban
   " " Villars
   pinnatifolia

3. Blooming about May 20
   Syringa vulgaris and its 300 varieties

4. Blooming about May 21
   ×Syringa chinensis (*S. persica × S. vulgaris*)
   " " alba
   " " bicolor
   " " metensis
   " " President Hayes
   " " saugeana
   " " julianae
   " " meyeri
   " " microphylla
   " " persica
   " " alba
   " " laciniata
   " " rubra
   " " pinetorum
   " " potanini
   " " pubescens

5. Blooming about June 5
   ×Syringa henryi (*S. josikaea × S. villosa*)
   " " Floreal
   " " Lutece
   ×Syringa josiflexa (*S. josikaea × S. reflexa*)
   " " Enid
   " " Guinevere
   Syringa josikaea
   " " H. Zabel
   " " pallida
   " " rosea
   " " rubra
   " " komarowi
PLATE IV

The Japanese tree lilac (*Syringa amurensis japonica*) is the last of all lilacs to bloom and is the most conspicuous in flower. This tree was photographed in the Arboretum several years before the Hurricane destroyed the upper half of the tree.
× *Syringa prestonae* (*S. reflexa* × *S. villosa*)

- Audrey
- Alice
- Desdemona
- Elinor
- Isabella
- Jessica
- Miranda
- Oberon
- Octavia
- Romeo
- Ursula
- Virgilia
- W.T. Macoun

× *Syringa sweginzowii* (*S. reflexa* × *S. sweginzowii*)

- *Syringa sweginzowii*
  - albida
  - tomentella
  - superba
  - villosa

6. Blooming about June 15

*Syringa amurensis*

- japonica
  - pekinensis

Not all the lilacs listed are of outstanding ornamental value, and not all are available in the trade in this country. It may be of value to Bulletin readers if a few in each group are pointed out as being good ornamental additions to garden plantings.

**Group 1.** The broadleaf lilac *S. oblata* comes from northern China and is valued because it is the first of all the lilacs to bloom and also because it is the only lilac with a red to orange autumn color. Unfortunately, there are times when the flower buds are injured by severe winters. The leaves are rarely disfigured by the mildew so evident on the common lilac in late summer. The variety *dilatata* is perhaps the best because of its large lilac-pink flower clusters.

**Group 2.** The several named varieties of *S. hyacinthiflora* chiefly originated in France as a result of Victor Lemoine’s hybridization at Nancy, France, and are of an intermediate lavender color. The varieties Turgot and Necker are probably the most prominent of the group. However, all the varieties of *S. hyacinthiflora* can be used for ornamental planting since they bloom slightly in advance of *S. vulgaris* and as a rule form larger growing and more vigorous shrubs. *S. pinnatifolia* is the least ornamental of any lilacs here listed.

**Group 3.** The Arboretum collection contains over 300 varieties of the common lilac. The better varieties, according to our selective list, were published in the Bulletin of May 20, 1986.

**Group 4.** This group of lilacs begins to bloom at the time the common lilac varieties are at their best. Both the Chinese and the Persian lilacs are valued for their lower habit of growth and for the larger
number of blooms produced every year. Frequently the varieties of the common lilac tend to bloom well one year but have comparatively few blossoms the year following. These two species, however, bloom profusely every year and so are particularly good for cutting purposes. Of the Chinese lilac varieties, saugeana is possibly the best because of its deep pink flowers. The cutleaf variety (laciniata) of the Persian lilac is also of value because of the feathery texture of its small lobed leaves. The hairy lilac (S.pubescens) is important because it is considered to be the most fragrant of all the lilacs, but the flowers are not as beautiful as those of the Chinese or Persian lilac or, in fact, those of most of the common lilac varieties. The blooms of the common lilac varieties last long enough so that they are still ornamental when the lilacs in Group 4 are at their best.

**Group 5.** Probably the best known of the varieties of *S.henryi* is Lutèce, noted for its large pale purple flower clusters which are not fragrant. This variety and the others in Group 5 are important for they bloom at a time when all the flowers of *S.vulgaris* varieties have faded. The variety Lutèce grows vigorously and is available from many nurseries.

The late lilac *S.villosa* is common in gardens, and justly so, because of its many creamy-white flower clusters and good dense habit of growth.

Two new hybrids are well worth growing, both being the result of Miss Isabella Preston's work at Ottawa, Canada. *Syringa prestonae*, named by Mrs. McKelvey in honor of Miss Preston, is a group of hybrids, the flowers of which contain a great deal of pink. Most of the lilacs blooming in early June have white flowers but, because the pink flowering *S.reflexa* is one parent, *S.prestonae* varieties are predominantly pink. This whole group is very important because the plants retain the vigorous growing qualities of *S.villosa* and some of the good color of *S.reflexa*. *Syringa reflexa* at the Arboretum has not proved a good shrub, though the individual flowers are very beautiful; but Miss Preston's hybrids are well worth growing in the United States. The second hybrid group has been named *S.swegiflexa*. At the Arboretum our plants are very small, but at Ottawa large plants are growing and clearly show that nurserymen in the United States would do well to grow at least a few of these varieties for their late flowers.

**Group 6.** The last of the lilacs is the largest growing of all—the Japanese tree lilac. This was formerly considered to be a separate species (and is listed by most nurserymen as *S.japonica*), but it is now considered to be a variety of *S.amurensis*. It forms a single trunk and has very conspicuous large creamy white flower clusters in mid-June. The bark is distinctly ornamental for it is very similar to that of *Prunus avium*. Where it is given sufficient space in which to expand, it develops into the most prominent of all lilacs.

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