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Study helps lilacs live better, longer

Lilacs are one of the most American of flowering shrubs. We cannot imagine a colonial farmhouse without lilacs.

hybridizers are at work and more are better for it.

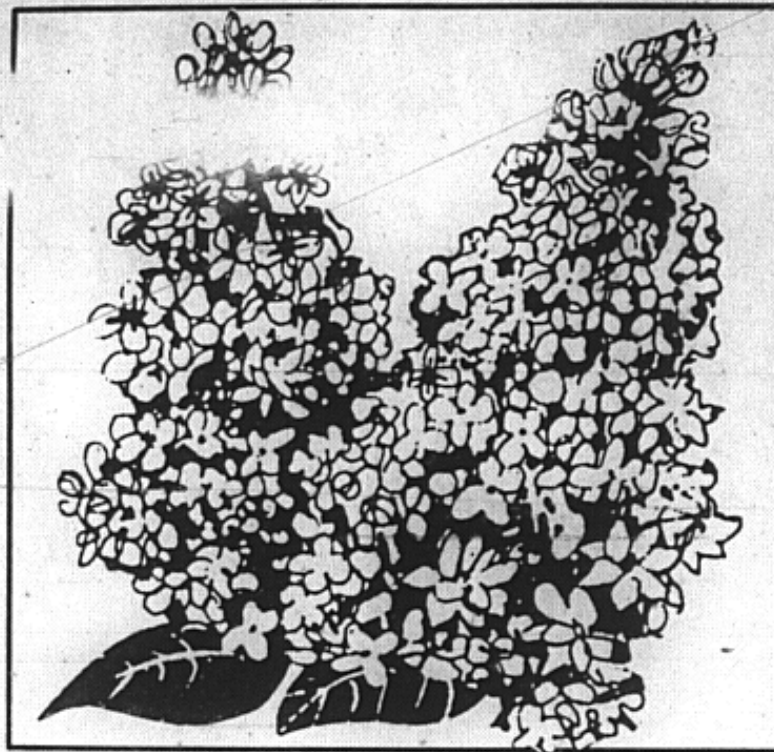
The lilac is New Hampshire's state flower and breeders at the University of New Hampshire have a special love and passion for these flowers. Before Dr. Owen Rogers joined the faculty at the University of New Hampshire in 1959 he was interested in the genetics of woody ornamental plants so it was with great pleasure that he joined the work that was being done on hybridizing lilacs. When he talks about the work the university is doing with lilacs you can almost hear drum rolls accompanying his enthusiastic comments.

The main aim in creating these new hybrids is to extend the period of bloom. The regular dooryard lilac, as beautiful as it is, blooms for a very short period of time, usually towards the end of May.

I have found that only two of their lilacs are readily available from nurseries. Miss Kim was originally raised by seeds collected by E.M. Meader in the Pouk Han Mountains of Korea. It blooms late and escapes frosts that can sometimes damage earlier varieties. It is smaller than most lilacs which makes it desirable for yard plantings, but it has the typical lavender flowers and fragrance. It has the added benefit of autumn color; the leaves turn a deep burgundy red in fall.

The James Macfarlane lilac blooms in an unusual and pretty shade of bright pink. This develops into a large bush and makes a handsome specimen planting as well as being useful combined with other shrubs in the landscape.

Because fragrance is so important



Pat
Leuchtman

Between
The Rows



to lilac lovers, the researchers at UNH are working to keep and improve the fragrance. Finally, the thrust at UNH is disease resistance.

Mildew, the powdery appearance on lilac leaves, is very common. It will not hurt the plant but it's not very attractive. Dr. Rogers says the University takes great pride in the

vigor and mildew resistance of their hybrids.

Tree lilacs bloom even later in the season. However, they don't look like lilac bushes; the flowers don't look like lilacs and don't have the lilac scent. Still, they are a good plant to grow because their small size makes them useful. These small trees grow

to 20 or 30 feet and the plumey, privet-like blossoms appear in July when no other flowering tree is in bloom.

Lilacs should be planted in full sun. Shade will not kill the bush, but you will get little or no bloom. Lilacs are very tough but they should be planted with care and mulched to keep down weeds at least for one year. Also keep them watered during dry periods so they don't suffer from water stress for the first year. After they are established it will be very difficult to harm them.

If you are planting several lilacs, prepare the whole area, don't just give several planting holes, especially if the soil is heavy. The roots may not be able to spread out and will eventually be strangled.

Don't use too much manure. Nitrogen will give you lots of foliage, but not much bloom. Phosphorus, potassium will give you good bloom.

Lilacs can grow very tall. Dr. Rogers once made the mistake of asking people who had lilacs more than 15 feet tall to get in touch with him. He was inundated with calls! He said lilacs need to be over 25 feet tall before they get into the champion class.

To keep your lilacs young and strong with the best quality of bloom, they should be thinned out and pruned regularly. Dr. Rogers said that I should take out one third of the oldest stems of my old lilac hedge this year, and continue that forever. That way the clump will stay between 6-8 feet tall — so I can get to those flowers — and the flowers will be of the best quality.

Sources: J.W. Jung Seed Co., Randolph, WI 53956; Wayside Gardens, Hodges, SC 29695-0001.