

# LILACS (SYRINGA)

---

Farmington Gardens    21815 SW Farmington Rd, Beaverton    503.649.4568    [www.farmingtongardens.com](http://www.farmingtongardens.com)

Lilacs are an old-fashioned favorite still cherished by many gardeners for their wonderful flower display and fragrance. Many people have memories of a particular lilac from their childhood, and lilacs are becoming more and more popular again as people see them around and get a sense of nostalgia as the smells and colors bring back old memories. Whether they were a part of your grandmother's garden, or you simply love the fragrance, lilacs will liven and brighten up your garden.

**Latin name:** *Syringa vulgaris*, etc.

**Type:** Deciduous shrubs

**Exposure:** Full sun

**Growth rate:** Moderate

**Hardiness:** to at least -30° F

**Size:** To about 12'x12', some may reach 20'+

**Soil:** Well-drained, alkaline

**Growth habit:** Upright, spreads with age

## Where should I plant my Lilac?

Be sure to give lilacs plenty of room to grow. Choose a site that gets plenty of sun, a little bit of shade is acceptable, but the more sun the better. Try to keep your lilac out of really high wind areas as this can damage the foliage and possibly knock over a larger specimen, as they are not deep rooters.

## What kind of soil do I need?

Lilacs need an alkaline soil, or exactly the opposite of our naturally acidic clay soil. You can achieve this by adding a good dose of lime yearly. Try to provide the best drainage you can, as heavy, wet soils do not make lilacs happy. Your plants will suffer if you don't make an effort to provide suitable soil for them.

## What kind of flowers are available?

All lilacs will have a standard pyramid shaped cluster composed of small flowers. The difference will be in bloom color, flower composition, and general appearance. In bloom type, they will be labeled as single, double, or triple. The single flower is the traditional type, with a single set of petals per flower. Doubles and triples have an increasingly larger number of petals, giving them a fuller, more intricate appearance. As for color, lilacs can range anywhere from white to red to purple, and occasionally a yellow color. All lilacs will be fragrant to a certain degree. The single lilacs will be the most fragrant, the doubles and triples will be less so.

## When and how should I prune and fertilize?

Lilacs don't need very much regular pruning to keep them in check. For the first few years, you will want to prune here and there to correct and distribute growth, but this will become less necessary with age. You should go through yearly and prune out any dead or weak branches. In the case of older, overgrown plants, you may need to rejuvenate the plant by selectively cutting out some of the older growth, or in severe cases, you can cut the tree in about half. It will be best to fertilize in the spring. Use a 5-10-10, or other fertilizer labeled especially for bloom. Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers. It is also a good idea to add a few cups of lime yearly in both fall and spring to help raise your soil pH.

## Will I see bloom the first year?

Probably not. The most important factor in lilac prosperity is its root system. The plant knows this, and the growers know this. For that reason, when you purchase a lilac, they have generally been cut back fairly hard to encourage root growth, rather than a quick bloom. When you put the plant in the ground, they will naturally try to establish their roots before blooming, so you may have to wait 2-3 years before you see the total bloom effect. You may see a few blooms the first year or two, but they may not be the true flowers.

**Lilacs generally won't bloom true to color until established.** So don't worry if it's not the exact color you've seen on the same plant elsewhere, it will eventually settle in and bloom correctly. One way to promote establishment and an earlier bloom is to avoid high nitrogen fertilizers and add higher levels of phosphorous and potassium.

### **What different kinds of lilacs are available?**

There are actually several different species of lilac commonly grown. The Common Lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*, is usually the one everyone imagines when they think of lilacs. Others include *S. reticulata*, the 30' tree lilac, and dwarves such as *S. meyeri*, *S. patula*, and *S. laciniata*. A newer group of hybrids, *Syringa x hyacinthiflora* have a better growth habit, nicer leaf, and larger flowers than the common lilac.

### **What is the main key to growing successful Lilacs around here?**

Proper planting is important, such as making sure the soil pH is acceptable, and that the soil is well drained. Perhaps the most important aspect of Lilac growing though, is patience. Those glorious Lilacs that you see around didn't get that way overnight. In fact, a lot of the most spectacular Lilacs you will see were planted and forgotten about for years. The main thing is, you will be greatly rewarded if you take into consideration that good Lilacs take time to flourish.

### **What are potential problems I may encounter?**

**Improper pH** If your soil is too acidic, your plant may refuse to bloom, or even grow in severe cases.

**Nutrient deficiency** Lilacs can sometimes lack a certain nutrients, resulting in yellowing leaves among other disorders. Be sure to fertilize occasionally.

**Bacterial diseases** Bacteria causes a few problems in lilacs, the most common being leaf spot, the worst being dieback and canker. In the case of dieback, the new growth will suddenly shrivel up. You will need to cut off the infected parts, and be sure to spray with a disease control chemical, like Daconil. If you have any of these problems, the best remedy is cleanup and a dormant spray program with copper sulfate or a related chemical.

**Borers** Little pinholes will appear at the base of branches, often accompanied by sawdust or a brownish ooze coming out of the area. Treat with a borer spray.

**Scale** Little brown scaly bumps will appear on the leaf. Treat with the proper insecticide, or use an oil dormant spray in winter.