

# April showers bring bright May flower

By Syrena Taylor

A plant that's originally native to Asia and Southern Europe flourishes in the back yards of Delaware. *Syringa vulgaris*, also known as the common lilac, is the most popular species of lilac. There are more than 20 other less familiar species of lilac too. Lilac is found in the same family, Oleaceae, as Olive, Privet, and Jasmine. Lilac usually reminds people of oriental decoration and creates a great aspect in both the landscape and garden.

This small to medium sized plant can be grown as a tree (reaching 15 feet in height) or as a shrub. Either way, the lilac makes a statement in your yard. After the April rain showers, comes May, and that's when this beautiful plant blooms, bringing a fragrance that fills the senses.

Not only does it give your nose a run for its money, but your eyes will be treated as well, watching the lilac attract wildlife. Wildlife attracted to this plant includes hummingbirds, bees and several butterfly species because of the sweet nectar from the flowers. If you're lucky, the birds will also nest in your lilacs.

Another great thing about this lovely plant is that the flowers can be cut and placed in a vase. Trust me when I say this, you will not need Febreze anymore during the month of May with some lilac in your house.

If you are looking to plant it outside, make sure you're in hardiness zones 3-7; Delaware being the southernmost limit; or they won't do well. For such a versatile plant, lilac comes with a small price. It's susceptible to heat, scale, powdery mildew, aphids, and sometimes caterpillars. Although powdery mildew is an eyesore, it doesn't harm the plant.

Lilacs like the sun, at least four hours, but in hotter zones prefer shade and moisture. Lilacs are a landscape plant and do great in moist soils. They can be planted in a variety of soils, from slightly acidic to slightly basic pH.

A great method to make a lilac bloom more is to prune it. The best way to prune any plant is right above a bud at a joining branch. Pruning allows more buds to grow and more flowers to bloom.

Another way to get an exciting mix of lilacs on one tree/shrub is to graft the two desired cultivars together. To graft, you take a piece of one cultivar, make an incision in the bark of another and place the two together. Always bind them and place sphag-



Submitted photo/Victor Lee  
May becomes better when the lilacs flower.

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num moss in the binding to help keep enough moisture in, but not too much. Although this can get you that lovely to weird mixed looking tree/shrub, growing the lilacs by their own roots is best.

Overall, *Syringa vulgaris* is a great plant to have around your house. With several heat tolerant hybrid cultivars, such as Lavender Lady, Evangeline, California Rose, and beautiful colors (shades of purple, white, pink, and a pale yellow), you can't go wrong with some lilac in your yard.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost, Herbarium Educator) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, or for more information about this article.

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