

## LILAC

### *Syringa vulgaris* L.

Plant Symbol = SYVU

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



Conservation Trees & Shrubs for Montana  
USDA, NRCS, Montana State Office

#### Alternative Name

common lilac

#### Uses

*Economic:* A green dye is obtained from the flowers and the leaves and a yellow-orange dye is obtained from the twigs (Grae 1974). An essential oil is obtained from the flowers and used in perfume fragrances.

*Ethnobotanic:* The bark and leaves has been chewed as a treatment for sore mouth (Moerman 1998).

#### Status

Please consult the Plants Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

#### Description

*General:* Olive Family (Oleaceae). Lilac is an introduced, perennial, deciduous shrub that grows between twelve to sixteen feet tall. The leaves are simple, ovate to broadly ovate, and five to twelve

centimeters long. The flowers are mostly white, lilac, or purple, pleasantly fragrant in long terminal panicles (Copperrider 1995). The fruiting capsules are one to 1.5 centimeters long, with flat winged seeds (Bruggen 1976).

*Distribution:* Common lilac is native of Europe, introduced and naturalized in the United States, escapes from cultivation from New York to North Dakota, south to Georgia and Kansas (Steyermark 1963). For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

#### Adaptation

Lilac is easily grown on most soil types but prefers neutral to slightly acid soil. This species does not tolerate poorly drained soils. It performs best in a warm sunny position.

#### Establishment

*Propagation by Seed:* Lilac seeds should be sown in March, or as soon as they are ripe, in a cold frame. The seeds should be pre-treated for four weeks of warm stratification and then three weeks cold stratification to improve germination. Place the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle. If sufficient growth is made by the summer it is possible to out-plant otherwise grow seedlings in a cold frame for the first winter and out-plant in late spring the next year.

#### Management

Common lilac should be planted in areas with good air circulation to reduce problems with powdery mildew. The first year after planting, *Syringa vulgaris* will probably not produce many, if any blooms; only after it has adapted itself to its new surroundings will it begin to produce flower clusters with vigor. Pruning should be done yearly to maintain desired height and improve form.

#### Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Commonly available through commercial nurseries. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

## References

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- Grae, I. 1974. *Nature's colors-dyes from plants*. MacMillan Publishing Company, New York, New York.
- Moerman, D. 1998. *Native American ethnobotany*. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.
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<[www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/pas/forestry/lilac.html](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/pas/forestry/lilac.html)>

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's [TARGET Center](#) at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

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