



The Shady Hill Gardening Tips Series

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Lilacs – the New Hampshire State Flower



New Hampshire's official state flower is the purple lilac. Lilacs grow widely throughout the state, and its fragrant flowers boom in May. A fun factoid - the earliest lilac planting in the state is at the Wentworth Coolidge Mansion in Portsmouth, where it is believed the common lilac, known as *Syringa Vulgaris*, was planted in 1750.

Hybrid French lilacs are the most common species with rich colors and fragrance. French lilacs are fairly slow growing and can reach a mature height of 8 to 15 feet. There are many varieties including single and double flowers in shades of white, pink, lavender, purple and magenta.

Lilacs make great hedges or screening as borders in sunny areas. One particular variety well-suited to this type of application is the Chinese Lilac (*Syringa Chinensis*) as it is faster growing than most common lilacs and is a more prolific bloomer. This variety grows 8 to 12 feet tall.

There are also some nice compact varieties available including Miss Kim and the Dwarf Korean lilac, which bloom about a week later than the common lilacs and have a "spicier" fragrance. Miss Kim will get about 6 to 8 feet tall (but can easily be maintained at 4 feet), while the Dwarf Korean will top out at about 4 feet. Miss Kim's foliage will also turn a dark red in the fall. Both of these varieties are excellent choices for small spaces or foundation plantings.

When planting, first determine if you are planting for an eventual hedge or not. If so, then space approximately six feet apart. If not, then allow 10 to 15 feet between plants. You can add some super phosphate or lime to the soil at the time of planting.

Once your lilac is established, you can prune, if necessary, immediately after its bloom cycle. When pruning, you want to prune any vigorous top growth to allow light penetration to the center of the plant. You can also prune any "suckers" which are small shoots that form at the bottom of the plant. It is best to prune immediately after bloom. Waiting until summer or fall can impact flower bud development for the next season.



Some lilacs take several years to bloom, so don't be discouraged. It is important to plant in a sunny location with at least 4 to 6 hours of good sun.