

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

APRIL 2020

Hello Everyone!

I cannot remember a time when I have walked more or felt more tuned in to every detail of the wonderful plant world that is awakening swollen bud by swollen bud, spring bright green tiny leaf by spring bright green tiny leaf. Snow drops have been up for a couple of weeks now, but just the other day, I saw the beginnings of the stinging nettles. Plants are very much like kittens, and then not so much. Remember the Ogden Nash verse "The trouble with kittens is that, they grow up to be a Cat"? Tiny first leaves are so adorable, so miraculous, and then they grow into ordinary leaves - but this is a year for us to be super conscious of those miracles. I had thought of stinging nettles as a plant to be avoided until a friend knowledgeable about herbs explained how to pick and cook them, how super packed with nutrition they are because of their deep roots that bring up good things from the earth, and how, for some folks, they are the first fresh herb to be eaten in the spring. Yesterday, Monty Don, an English gardener and garden show presenter, posted a beautiful potful of bright green nettles about to become soup.

Last month seems so very long ago! But we had a lovely meeting with one of Theresa Terry's adorable raffles, and a great talk about Hydrangeas from our friend and master gardener Chris Ferrera. And no, we won't meet in April when Evelyn Garstang was going to do a Flower Arranging Demonstration. And we probably won't meet in May, when Anna Smith was going talk to us and lead us through some trying out of Dyeing with Herbs. But they will be rescheduled, and we will soon be together again.

Thank you to everyone who had comments or suggestions about the spring cleaning of our By-laws. Pat Neri will send the latest (and perhaps the last) draft to all, and then we will discuss, and if no new changes, vote when we next meet.

Meanwhile, here are two links that I think you may enjoy if you haven't already seen them: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMXD4h5w8D8>, really funny and fun if you love birds. There is a cast list at the end.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSx9Tcl1ong> is a pastiche of fabulous gardens, and for those of us that like to browse Garden videos, there are names of gardens to research further.

Let's enjoy the extra time we all have; I find myself spring cleaning my garden so much more carefully and with much more attention to detail than ever before!

Best to all!

Harriet

Horticultural Column

By Harriet Wetstone

I am writing this on a chilly wet Sunday afternoon, and I am having trouble gearing myself up for my usual afternoon walk. I think about where I wish I could walk, and what immediately comes to mind is the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, just blocks away from where my kids live, and the wonderful stand of lilacs that come into bloom somewhere from mid-April to the beginning of May. You can just drown in the wonderful scent, and there are so many lilac shapes and shades, from the deepest purple to pale pink, to glowing creamy white. I grew up with lilacs, and now, having a mostly shaded woodland garden, the few lilacs I have struggle to bloom, some years a little better than others.



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Syringa (lilac), are flowering woody plants in the olive family (Oleaceae). Syringa is a genus of 12 currently recognized species. The genus is most closely related to Ligustrum (privet) and is classified with it in Oleaceae tribus Oleaeae subtribus Ligustrinae. While there are only 12 recognized species, there over 20,000 cultivars and hybrids in existence, and there for the tremendous variety of colors and forms.



Lilacs are native to woodland and scrub from southeastern Europe to eastern Asia. The common lilac, (*Syringa vulgaris*), a classic pale purple with heart shaped leaves, originated in Eastern Europe. It is this species and many of its hybrids that was so frequently selected by French nurserymen that it is frequently referred to as "French lilac."

It is thought that the first lilacs arrived here during the Colonial period and were planted around 1750 at the Governor Wentworth Estate in New Hampshire. Thomas Jefferson planted lilacs in his great garden at Monticello in 1767, recording all the planting details in his Garden Book. George Washington documented planting lilacs in his garden in a letter dated March 3, 1785. The Arnold Arboretum's collection of lilacs is one of the largest in North America - but these lilacs predate the establishment of the Arboretum in 1872. They were

planted by Benjamin Bussey, a wealthy businessman, who fought in the American Revolution and who in later life developed great interest in horticulture. He left land and means in his will for the purpose of establishing an undergraduate school of agriculture and horticulture at Harvard.

Despite the popularity of *Syringa vulgaris* (now often called old fashioned lilac) most lilac species originated in Asia, including the most popular 'Miss Kim' (*Syringa patula*) and *Syringa Meyeri* 'Palibin.' The Japanese lilac tree (*Syringa reticulata*) is a lilac that grows into a tree form rather than a bush, and while scented does not have the much-loved fragrance of the *Syringa vulgaris*. There is also the Chinese lilac tree (*Syringa pekinensis*) which is similar but smaller.

Lilacs are plants for colder climates (zones 3 - 7). They need a period of cold initiated dormancy to trigger flowering. Lilacs are known as easy care - they want well drained, humus rich soil and lots of sun and no other special care other than pruning. They are one of those shrubs that can get messily out of hand. One way to deal with this is to cut them down to six or eight inches in late winter, and then cultivate the strongest of the several shoots that will come back. As lilac wood needs to be three years old to flower, perhaps a better way is to prune back only a third over a few years, that way ensuring bloom every year.

From Walt Whitman's poem: *When Last by the Dooryard... In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings, Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green, With many a pointed blossom rising delicate with the perfume strong I love, With every leaf a miracle. and from this bush in the dooryard, With delicate-color'd blossoms and heat-shaped leaves of rich green, A sprig with its flower I break. . .*

Thanks to Arnold Arboretum, The Spruce, Wikipedia, Morton Arboretum, Iowa University, The Poetry Foundation.