

TAKING CARE OF YOUR LILACS

Lilacs are able to survive cold winters and generally grow better in slightly alkaline soil and in full sun. Check the growth size (this will vary with the variety) so it is not planted too close to a structure. This will eliminate the need to transplant it later.

PLANTING:

- Grow lilacs in fertile, humus rich and well- drained soil. Lilacs prefer a pH of 6 or 7 so adding some compost will enrich the soil. Test soil for acidic rates.
- Full sun for at least 6 hours or more for the best blooms.
- **Drainage is important.** Lilacs do not like 'wet feet'. Do not plant in a flood zone. Make sure the site drains well. Lilacs are water loving plants but do not like to sit in water.
- Spread out the roots as you settle the plant in the ground. Work topsoil in around the roots. Water in. Then fill in the hole with more topsoil.
- Space multiple lilac shrubs 5 to 15 feet apart, depending on the variety.

CARE:

- Lilacs will not bloom if they are over fertilized. Fertilizers differ from one manufacturer to another, so it is difficult to give an exact number. Use granular fertilizer as the soluble materials leach quickly. Low nitrogen fertilizers such as 10-10-10 or 5-10-5 will encourage bloom and not push the foliage too hard. Use sparingly and not usually recommended when you first plant the lilac. With so many varieties of lilacs, it is best to research what each will need for best health. Remember that the buds are set the year previous, so fertilizer that is applied now will work on this *year's leaves* but *next year's bloom*.
- Best to irrigate the roots and not the foliage. Spreading a layer of mulch over the soil will help retain the moisture and reduce weeds. Be sure to keep the mulch from the trunk of the plant so that air can circulate around the base of the stem. Piling much around the trunk of lilacs in 'volcano fashion' invites disease and insects.
- Healthy leaves will have a lustrous shine, look pert and not be puckered. In the summer if the leaves lose their shine, borders of leaves brown a little, look limp or droopy, it is a sign that they need to be irrigated.
- To improve the flowering of lilacs, keep the grass from growing around them. A 16 to 24 is usually a good rule of thumb. Can cover area with bark or stone to keep the grass down.
- After your lilac bush has finished blooming, spread some lime and **well-rotted** manure around the base. Trim the bush to shape if necessary and remove the suckers at the same time. Because of the vast amount of cultivars, it is best to zero in on the research for your individual plant.

PRUNING:

- Hint: If your lilac flower clusters are getting smaller, as your plant ages, time to prune.
- Lilacs bloom on old wood. Can be left unpruned and will produce more flowers every year. Plan of scheduled pruning ensures that enough sun and air circulation reach the inner leaves.
- If pruned, the plant will respond by producing fast-growing young vegetative growth with no flowers in an attempt to restore the removed branches.
- *Lilacs do not have to be pruned every year. If pruning is required, it should be done **right after** the flowering is finished before next year's flower buds are formed.*
- Every year after blooming, remove any dead wood. Prune out the oldest canes down to the ground. Remove any dead wood. Remove small suckers.
- Cutting off faded blooms, just below the flower head, immediately after the flower period will allow the plant to concentrate on preparing more flower buds and Not seeds.
- Pruning should be angled ¼" above a bud.
- Heading back involves the shortening of individual stems in order to remove dead or diseased wood and restrict the size of the plant.
- Cuts are made back to the parent stem rather than to the ground and to balance the plant's shape.
- If your lilac is old and in bad shape, you will have to do more drastic pruning. Lilacs are very hardy and will usually benefit from severe pruning but will lose blooms for some years.
- Paying attention to pruning as necessary will keep the plant in form and avoid drastic pruning.
- Once lilacs become twenty years old they begin to decline in quality of flower production. To restore the lilac's capacity to produce quality bloom, one must reduce the number of growing points. May need a three year plan, preferably in dormancy (winter), when you can see the naked branches.

PESTS/DISEASE:

- Prone to attack by slugs and snails.
- Powdery white mildew may appear after a summer of hot, humid weather. It may be unsightly but it will usually not do any harm.