

Celebrating this late-spring icon, *Lilacs* explores a flower that combines exquisite nostalgia with timeless elegance.

Loved and lauded by all, lilacs are back in vogue. Whether gathered in lavish armfuls for the house, grown as a specimen tree, or as part of a hedge or collection, they are an essential part of the spring season – fleeting, fabulous, and instantly recognizable.

From the delightful blues of President Lincoln to the soft blush of Beauty of Moscow, rich purple Congo, and fresh Jeanne d'Arc, these are flowers that will bring drama and sophistication to both home and garden.

Illustrated with bespoke images by leading floral photographer Georgianna Lane and with lively, engaging text from well-known garden expert Naomi Slade, *Lilacs* traces the history of a plant that has conquered the world, combining a visual feast with practical tips for growing and enjoying the lavish blooms at home.

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LILACS

NAOMI SLADE
photography by
GEORGIANNA LANE

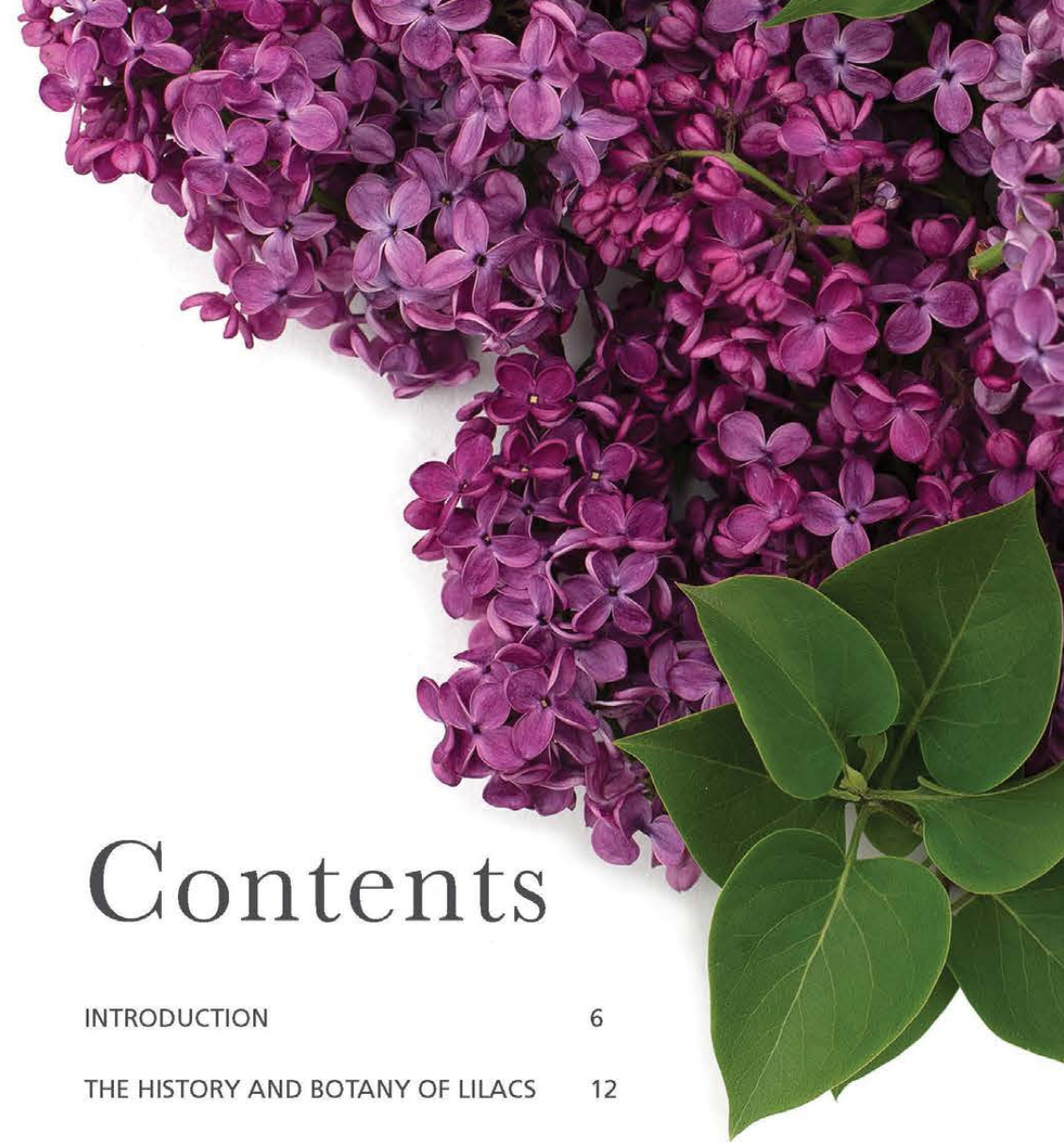


GIBBS
SMITH

NAOMI SLADE
photography by
GEORGIANNA LANE

LILACS

beautiful varieties for home and garden



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Syringa emodi

A large plant, growing to around 4.5m (15ft) tall, the Himalayan lilac, was discovered in the early 1830s towards the western end of the mountain range, near the Kurram Valley in Afghanistan. Unlike most lilacs, it positively enjoys rich, moist soil, and will sulk and may drop its leaves if conditions get too dry underfoot. It also prefers some shade.

The flowers are gorgeous; white, delicate and airy, but they bring themselves down to earth with a less-than-delicious scent.

Syringa josikaea

The Hungarian lilac is one of just two species that are native to Europe, but compared to *Syringa vulgaris*, it is much less well-known. Although usefully late-blooming, it is less tolerant of drought and poor soil conditions, the flowers are smaller and less fragrant and it is slightly less hardy than its common cousin.

Syringa josikaea is now considered endangered in its native habitat of the Carpathian Mountains.

Syringa pubescens* subsp. *pubescens*, formerly known as *S. meyeri

This naturally dwarf lilac was 'discovered' in 1908 by American Frank Meyer, in a garden near Beijing. Reliable in its flowering – even sometimes producing a scattered second flush of blooms – it develops maroon autumn colour and is hardy in USDA Zones 3–7 (RHS H5–7). Generally, this is a healthy and tolerant shrub which has grown in popularity because of its small size.

Syringa* × *prestoniae

Winter-hardy in the extreme, tolerating conditions down to USDA Zone 2 (RHS H7), the Preston lilacs are named for hybridizer Isabella Preston, who crossed *Syringa villosa* with *S. komarowii* subsp. *reflexa*, to create a series of tall shrubs or small trees that flower a week or so after the common lilac.

Syringa pubescens

This species of lilac is native to China and is named for its leaves, which are hairy, or pubescent, on the underside. It is naturally dwarf, just 0.9–1.8m (3–6ft) tall, and slow-growing, so it is a good choice for a container or low hedge. A hardy, healthy, non-suckering shrub, the scented flowers are produced later than most lilacs, arriving in early summer, so they are rarely lost to frost.

Syringa villosa

Syringa villosa produces a large shrub around 3.7m (12ft) tall which is hardy to USDA Zone 2, highly floriferous and tolerant of drought and salt, so the average-to-objectionable scent of the flowers can probably be forgiven. It was discovered in China by French missionary Pierre d'Incarville in 1750.



Syringa pubescens subsp. *microphylla*

syn. *S. microphylla*

This interesting and versatile little lilac is an excellent choice for smaller gardens, as not only is it compact, but it is one of the few *Syringa* that will sometimes produce a second flush of flowers later in the season.

The plant itself is delicate, with small leaves that are resistant to mildew, while the highly scented flowers are used in China to make tea – according to reports from plant explorer Joseph Hers, following his collecting expedition in the 1920s.

Since this variety is naturally dwarf, it lends itself to growing containers and, after the standard period of winter chill, it could be brought into a cool greenhouse. It is usually a mid-season bloomer, but thus protected it will flower over a month earlier than it usually would, getting lilac time off to a flying and fragrant start.

Syringa pubescens subsp. *microphylla* is sometimes known as the little leaf lilac or the daphne lilac.

Syringa pubescens subsp. *microphylla* syn. *S. microphylla*

Height Up to 3.7m (12ft)

Spread Up to 3.7m (12ft)

Flower size Small

Scent One of the most fragrant

Colour Each floret is palest pink with a rosy throat and corolla

Foliage A small, pointed oval

In the garden Small enough for a pot or other large container

As a cut flower Charming



Miss Canada

Hot pink and super-sassy, Miss Canada is a cheerleader among late-flowering lilacs and she is the work of William Cumming, who was the brother-in-law of Frank Skinner, legendary breeder of a fine range of cold-tolerant plants.

Flowering several weeks after the main gamut of *Syringa vulgaris*, Miss Canada is the progeny of *S. × josiflexa* 'Redwine' and *S. × prestoniae* 'Hiawatha', and while she is sometimes classed as an *× prestoniae* lilac, in fact this plant is within the Villosae Group.

Lilac Miss Canada is compact and relatively slow-growing, which makes it ideal for smaller gardens. The small, tubular flowers are sweetly scented, and bubblegum-pink buds open to reveal paler pink single blooms, the interiors of which are the shade of strawberry ice cream.

Syringa Villosae Group 'Miss Canada'

Height 1.8–3m (6–10ft)

Spread 1.8–3m (6–10ft)

Flower size Medium

Scent Sweet

Colour Rose pink and baby pink

Foliage Green

In the garden A cheerful splash of colour, especially when paired with peonies and campanula

As a cut flower Makes a pretty posy for a smaller vase

