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GROWING HEALTHY LILACS

Lilacs are one of the most popular ornamental flowering shrubs in the Rochester area. Lilacs are dependable, hardy, and very commonly used in Monroe County. Over 500 cultivars are maintained in Rochester's famed Highland Park lilac collection. Local homeowners can observe their growing and flowering characteristics before ordering them for their gardens.

Lilacs produce purple, white, violet, blue, and pink flowers. They prefer fertile, well-drained soil in a sunny location, but are found to tolerate most soil conditions encountered locally.

Lilacs are commonly propagated by budding or grafting different cultivars on California Privet rootstocks. Lilacs can also be grown on their own root, a more desirable, but more expensive practice. Budded or grafted lilacs, in some cases, sucker more profusely and may be more susceptible to borer attack than lilacs grown on their own root. Also, the under stock may sucker and crowd out the lilac cultivar.

RECOMMENDED CULTURAL PRACTICES:

- **Transplanting**: Lilacs can be transplanted successfully anytime during the late fall or early spring. However, early spring transplanting is more advisable, since plants then have a full growing season to become established in their new location.

- **Fertilization:** Lilacs grown in well-fertilized lawn areas may not require additional fertilization. But, if desired, lilacs can be fertilized during March and April. They may also be fertilized in the Rochester area between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Apply two to three pounds of 5-10-5 or one to two pounds of 10-6-4 fertilizer per 100 square feet of soil beneath the shrubs. Broadcast the fertilizer uniformly on the soil beneath the lilacs. Place the majority of the fertilizer near the drip line or edge of the foliage canopy rather than close to the base of the lilac. The fertilizer may be left on the soil surface.

Never fertilize lilacs between July 1st and Thanksgiving. Fertilizing at this time may encourage a flush of late season growth subject to winter injury, and retard the normal onset of dormancy in the fall, greatly increasing the risk of winter injury.

- **Pruning:** Regular pruning is essential to maintain lilacs in an attractive size and form. Regular pruning favorably enhances flower quality and abundance. Pruning should be undertaken immediately after lilacs flowers.

When pruning at this time, remove wood in the following sequence.

- Dead, dying, or diseased wood
- Surplus suckers (vigorous, upright growth from the base of the plant with no lateral branches)
- Conflicting or intersecting growth
- Growth not compatible with desired shape and size
- Spent flower heads, being careful not to damage wood that will support next season's growth

Pest problems

- **Lilac Borers:** Lilac borers are cream-colored larvae, about one-inch long, that bore into the sapwood where they mine irregularly and later move to the heartwood. Damaged branches have small holes in the bark. Often, a dark liquid oozes from infested areas. Heavily infested limbs may die back or break off, following initial wilt symptoms. Keeping old wood pruned out is effective in minimizing borer populations.
- Cultural control: Prune out infested stems. Dig out borer larvae with a knife and a piece of wire with a sharp end or barb. Keeping trees healthy and vigorous by proper cultivation, fertilization, pest control, and water will help infested trees overcome the effects of borer injury.
- Pesticide recommendations: Imidacloprid** (see note) may be used as a systemic
- **Leaf Miner:** Young caterpillars mine leaves early in June. Infested leaves appear transparent due to insect feeding between the upper and lower leaf surfaces. Spray in mid- to late May (246–363 GDD) and again in mid- to late July (1388–1644 GDD) with acephate, lambda-cyhalothrin, or permethrin. Or use imidacloprid** as a systemic.
- **Oystershell scale:** Prune out if infestation is small. Horticultural oil may be applied in April (7-91 GDD) Treat for crawlers in late May to mid-June (707-11512 GDD) using hort. Oil, acephate, or propiconazole as a systemic.
- **Powdery mildew:** Follow disease sanitation practices*. Apply fungicides such as *Bacillus Subtilis*, chlorothalonil, or propiconazole. Follow the label directions.

- **WEED CONTROL:** For the health of the lilac plant, it's important that grass is not allowed to grow near the base of the trunk. Weed control around the base of lilacs can be accomplished on two ways:
  - Regular cultivation – if the lilac is in a bed where cultivation is practiced
  - Mulches – Using bark or other types of readily available organic mulch in a 2-4 inch layer will benefit lilacs roots and keep weeds to a minimum

Reference: *Cornell Pesticide Guidelines for Managing Pests around the Home - 3/14*
Revised 4/03, Reviewed 7/05, 8/10, 4/12, 8/15

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* Disease Sanitation Practices – Avoid crowding plants; allow air circulation around and within plants. Prune to thin plants or planting and/or to remove the diseased parts. Prune only when conditions are dry, and, where feasible, disinfect pruning tools between cuts or between plants. Discard all diseased tissue and in autumn, rake and discard or destroy all fallen leaves, fruit, and branches. Avoid wetting foliage overnight or for long periods of time.