



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

NOVEMBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

When I think of lilacs I think of huge, fragrant shrubs at my grandparent's farm. My yard is quite small; are there any lilacs for small gardens? Can lilacs be grown in part shade?

Syringa (lilac) is a great shrub for cold climates as they need cold winters to grow well. They grow best in full sun; ideally six hours or more per day. Although they will tolerate part shade, they will bloom less. Many lilacs grow quite large; however, there are some smaller varieties that grow well in our area.

Syringa-Fairytale® Lilac Series bloom mid to late in the season, are upright rounded plants that reach a mature size of 5' h. x 4' w., have good disease resistance, and are hardy to -35°F. Prince Charming® is lavender-pink and Tinkerbelle® is pink.

Syringa x hyacinthiflora (Hyacinth Lilacs) reach approximately 10'x10' at maturity, so they may be too large for your garden, but they are quite lovely, bloom early in the season and are hardy to -45°F.

Syringa meyeri (Meyer or Dwarf Korean Lilac) bloom mid to late season, are hardy to -35°F and reach 7'x 8' at maturity. The variety 'Palibin' is smaller at 5'x 7'. Although they are called "Korean lilacs" they actually originate from China.

Syringa x prestoniae (Preston or Nodding Lilac) is hardy to -40°F and blooms late in the season. 'Donald Wyman' may get too big for your garden at 10'x 8', but 'Coral' gets 7'x 6' and 'Hiawatha' gets 8'x 6' at maturity. 'Hiawatha' has very striking magenta buds and both are resistant to powdery mildew.

Syringa pubescens (Manchurian Lilac) 'Miss Kim' is very popular. It is hardy to -35°F and blooms late in the season. Its mature height and width are 6'x 6'. This species has resistance to powdery mildew and sports small flowers that bloom profusely. 'Miss Kim' is a lavender-blue color.

Syringa vulgaris is the Common Lilac. This species varies greatly in size, is hardy to -40°F, generally blooms midseason and often has a strong fragrance. Some smaller varieties that do well in our area are 'Albert F. Holden' (silvery purple, 8'x7'), 'Avalanche' (white, 8'x6'), 'Lucie Baltet' (pale pink, 5'x5'), 'Marie Frances' (pink, 8'x6'), 'Prairie Petite' (pink-lavender, 3'x3'), 'Sarah Sands' (dark purple, 8'x6'), 'Sensation' (purple-white, 8'x6'), 'Wedgewood Blue' (deep blue, 6'x5'), and 'Wonderblue' ('Little Boy Blue') (lavender-blue, 6'x5').

Dear Master Gardener:

Which perennials should I cut down now and which ones should I leave until spring?

Gardeners have a tendency to want to cut all herbaceous plants back and tidy up the garden before the snow falls; however some perennials should not be cut back at all, others provide food for birds, while others provide winter interest to our bleak Minnesota landscape. Low growing evergreen or semi-evergreen perennials, such as heuchera, tiarella, dianthus, moss phlox and hellebores should not be cut back.

Allow the foliage to remain until spring for added protection to the crown on the following perennials: Aster, Astilbe, Chrysanthemum, Delphinium (cut stalks to basal foliage), Hosta, Lady's Mantle, Penstemon (cut tall foliage to basal growth), Russian Sage, and Salvia (cut back to basal growth). Some perennials, such as Asclepias, Platycodon (balloon flower) and hardy Hibiscus emerge late in spring; so leaving a portion of them will help you keep track of their location.

Some perennials create winter interest in the garden because of seed pods or interesting flower heads. Baptisia, Achillea, Sedum, and Joe Pye weed are all flowers that can be left in place to enliven the garden during late fall and winter. The plumes of some ornamental grasses, especially feather reed grass, also add interest and vertical accents to the winter landscape. Cut back grasses in early spring before growth emerges to avoid damaging new shoots.

Although it may not be attractive, some perennials can be left until spring because their seed heads provide food for birds. They include Coreopsis, Monarda (Bee Balm), Echinacea (Coneflowers), Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan), and Heliopsis. Some annuals also provide food for birds if not dead-headed and left in place; to include, Cosmos, bachelor's buttons and zinnias.

Perennials that you may go ahead and cut down now are Hemerocallis (daylily), Brunnera, Bearded and Siberian Iris, Phlox (not moss phlox) and Veronica. If you have any plant that is diseased-infected, cut it down and destroy the plant debris. Herbaceous peonies can be cut back to the ground after the foliage turns brown and collapses, being careful not to disturb the reddish buds off to the sides, since they will produce stems the following spring.

Dear Master Gardener:

Last winter something ate my yews almost to skeletons. They made a modest comeback this summer and I would like to protect them this winter. What do you recommend?

Both rabbits and deer are fond of yews and are likely the culprits. A combination of repellants and restrictions is probably your best course of action. Any commercial deer and rabbit repellant can be used, but be sure the product is labeled for those critters and is used according to instructions. Applications throughout the winter will be necessary. Restriction can be accomplished by making circular cages of hardware cloth or other fencing material with no larger than one-inch mesh openings. The cages should be four feet tall and wide enough to allow for use in the future as the plant grows. Secure cage bottoms several inches into the soil. Two or three three-quarter-diameter metal or bamboo rods woven vertically down the

cages and shoved into the soil will protect them further from winter winds and storms. Similar cages can be used to protect other valuable and susceptible shrubs from animals.

NOVEMBER GARDEN TIPS

- Clean hand tools, rakes, hoes, shovels, spades and digging forks. First brush off dried dirt, then wash with water. When tools are dry, wipe them down with an oil-saturated rag to prevent rust. That same rag can be used to hydrate and lubricate wooden tool handles.
- Continue watering outdoor plantings—perennials, bulbs, shrubs and trees—until the ground freezes.
- Trim fall-bearing raspberries to the ground. There will be no early-season crop but a heavier fall crop will ensue.
- Store all liquid garden products where they will not freeze. All garden chemicals should be stored where children cannot reach them.
- Sharpen pruning tools for dormant pruning of shrubs and trees in late winter and early spring.
- Drain and store hoses on a relatively warm day so they will coil more easily, Store them in a flat, lying position rather than a hanging one.
- Place most houseplants where they will get maximum winter light. Stop fertilizing until spring.
- Label perennials so that you will remember what is where in the spring. This is especially important for plants late to emerge.
- Continue cutting grass as long as it keeps growing. The final mowing does not have to be shorter than usual.

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. All information given in this column is based on research and information provided by the University. To ask a question, call the Master Gardener Help Line at 218-824-1000, extension 4040 and leave a recorded message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

