



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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For Immediate Release

The Fragrance of Spring

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Spring has many fragrances – gentle rains, freshly mown grass and flowering fruit trees – but none compare to the sweet fragrance of the common lilac. In fact, floral oil is extracted commercially from the lilac flowers and used in the manufacture of scented soaps, candles and other household items.

Aside from its fragrance, the common lilac is well-known for its array of delicate flowers and dark green leaves which are shed in the fall. It is very well adapted to cold, having a cold hardiness rating of USDA Zone 3.



Photo by ISU Horticulture Specialist Cindy Haynes.

The flowers of the common lilac normally appear as clusters in early- to mid-May and may last 2-3 weeks. Flowers come in a variety of forms – single or double – and colors include white, pink, light blue, magenta, lavender and purple.

Allow room for the common lilac as it is not a small shrub. Heights and widths may be 10 to 15 feet. When planting, select a sight that is full sun. Foliage is often covered with powdery mildew when grown in partial shade or in areas of poor circulation. Different types of soil are tolerated if they are not too acidic or poorly drained.

The common lilac was introduced into the U.S. as an ornamental landscape plant and is native to southeast Europe. Historical records reveal that the bark and leaves have been chewed as a treatment for sore mouth.

For more information about deciduous shrubs, ISU Extension and Outreach has a publication, “Deciduous Shrubs” that may be ordered on-line from <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/6450>. Descriptions and photos of 75 shrubs (organized by height) will simplify your hunt for the right shrub in your landscape.

Meanwhile, while out strolling, enjoy the fragrance of spring!

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