



# *Syringa reticulata* Japanese Tree Lilac<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Although a Lilac, this member of the species is quite different in appearance than those with which gardeners are more familiar (Fig. 1). Its upright habit varies from symmetrical to irregular. Cultivars including 'Ivory Silk' and 'Summer Snow' could be used instead of the species due to the more consistent habit and more flowers. This is a very large shrub or small tree, reaching a height of about 20 to 30 feet with a 15-foot-spread. The huge clusters of creamy white flowers, borne in early summer for about two weeks, are the main ornamental feature but lack the fragrance of the spring-blooming Lilacs -- this Lilac's fragrance is more suggestive of privet. It is being used as a street tree in some parts of the country, particularly in areas with overhead power lines. Japanese Tree Lilac is also popular as a garden specimen or as an accent in a shrub border. It deserves to be in any landscape. It provides shade and a colorful spring show for a deck or patio area. Green fruit clusters are somewhat showy when viewed from close range.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Syringa reticulata*

**Pronunciation:** sih-RING-guh reh-tick-yoo-LAY-tuh

**Common name(s):** Japanese Tree Lilac

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 4 through 7A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns

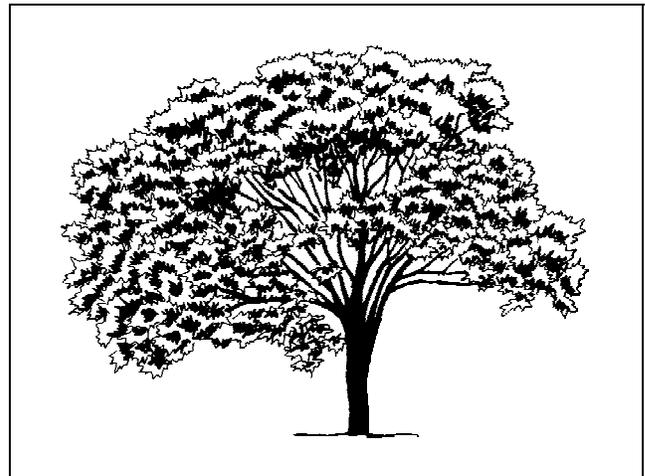


Figure 1. Mature Japanese Tree Lilac.

(4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 20 to 30 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette

**Crown shape:** round; upright; vase shape

**Crown density:** dense

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-610, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire; undulate

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** banchidodrome; pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** summer flowering; very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated; oval

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green; yellow

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown

**Current year twig thickness:** thick

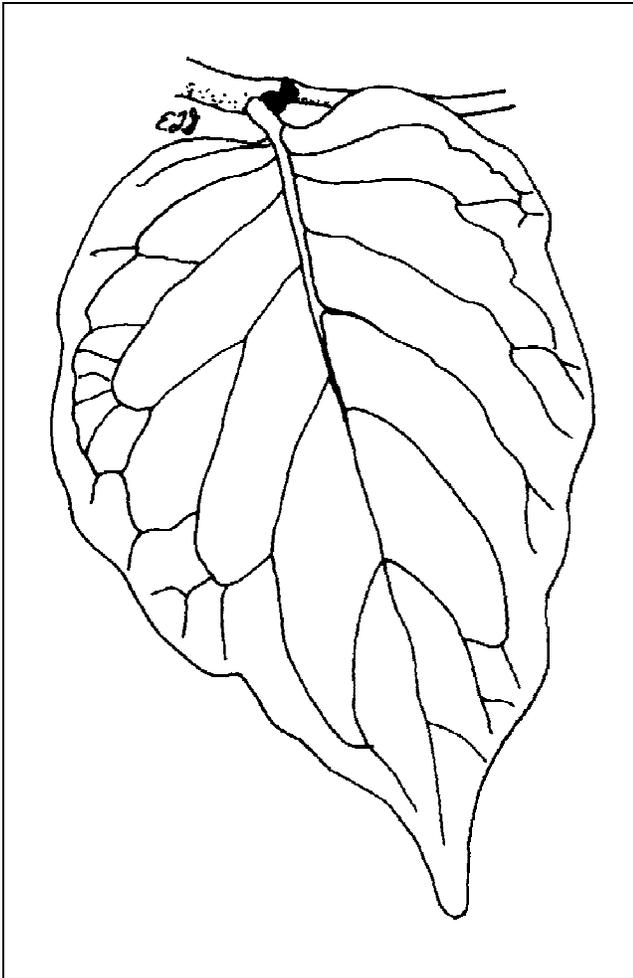


Figure 3. Foliage of Japanese Tree Lilac.

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerance:** moderate

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

### USE AND MANAGEMENT

The tree is sold as a multi-stemmed specimen or as a single-trunked street tree. The trunk can be trained to grow fairly straight to 10 feet and then branches into a stiff, upright, rounded head of foliage. The bark is somewhat showy with prominent lenticels, being reminiscent of Black Cherry. As with other Lilacs, the plant as a shrub may need rejuvenation by pruning every few years as it becomes overgrown. It is perhaps the most pest-resistant Lilac, but that does not mean it is pest-free. Regular irrigation during dry spells help make this a pest-resistant tree.

Japanese Tree Lilac is tolerant of urban conditions, growing in poor, clay or alkaline soil. The gorgeous flowers are most showy and prolific when the tree is located in full sun with good drainage. Plants in partial shade can be infected with powdery mildew which can cause some defoliation.

Available cultivars include: 'Ivory Silk' - grows in USDA hardiness zones 3 to 6, upright oval, nice flowers, borne in alternate years; 'Summer Snow' - grows in USDA hardiness zones 3 to 6, upright, round shape, persistent seed pods.

### Pests

If properly located on an appropriate site, there are few problems.

Lilac borer larvae tunnel in the branches, causing wilting, particularly on drought-stressed trees. Severely infested branches may break off. Remove and destroy infested stems. Keep plants healthy with regular waterings during dry weather and by fertilizing.

Lilac leaf miner tunnels in the leaves in early summer. After mining the leaf, the caterpillars emerge and web leaves together and skeletonize the foliage. Light infestation can be controlled by hand picking.

Scales are most often found infesting the lower stems and often blend in with the bark. Inspect unhealthy-looking plants for scale infestations. Spray with horticultural oil to control overwintering stages.

## Diseases

It is usually free of serious disease.

Bacterial blight is most serious on white flowered selections. The young shoots develop black stripes or one side of the shoot turns black. Spots develop on the leaves, forming a water-soaked blotch. Young leaves turn black and die quickly. On older shoots, the spots enlarge more slowly. The flowers wilt and darken. The disease is worse when wet weather occurs as the new shoots are developing. Thin the crown to increase air circulation. Remove and destroy diseased shoots and avoid excessive nitrogen fertilizer.

Phytophthora blight kills stems to the ground. The leaves turn black and shoots have brown lesions on them.

Leaf blotch causes zoned, brown spots. The infected area drops out, leaving a hole in the leaf.

Many fungi cause leaf spots.

Powdery mildew coats the leaves with white powder. During wet weather, Lilacs mildew easily. Mildew is especially severe on shade-grown plants. Ignore late season infections.

Verticillium wilt causes wilting and premature leaf drop. The disease may kill one, several or all the branches. Try fertilizing regularly to help prevent diseases.

Bacterial crown gall causes round, warty galls on the stems near the soil line. Remove infected plants and do not replant with a sensitive tree in the same spot.