ARNOLD ARBORETUM

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BULLETIN

OF

POPULAR INFORMATION

JAMAICA PLAIN, MASS.

JUNE 14, 1922

Philadelphus, unfortunately called *Syringa* in popular language for *Syringa* is the scientific name of the Lilacs, is flowering rather earlier than usual this year. There is a good collection of these plants in the Arboretum, and the group is the largest here of the shrubs which flower in June. *Philadelphus* is a widely distributed genus with representatives in North America in the southern states, the southern Rocky Mountain region and the Pacific States, in Japan, Korea, China, on the Himalayas and in eastern Europe. The white and usually fragrant flowers are the only attraction of these plants; they are not interesting in habit; the leaves fall in the autumn without change of color, and the fruit, which is a dry capsule, is smaller than that of the Lilac. During the last twenty years several new species of this genus have been introduced into gardens from eastern Asia, and plant-breeders have made more valuable contributions to few groups of garden plants than to *Philadelphus*. Most *Syringas* bloom freely every year; they require rich well drained soil, and the presence of lime in it has no bad effects on them. Better than most shrubs they can grow and flower in shade, and are therefore valuable for undergrowth in border plantations of trees. There are now in the collection some thirty species with a few varieties and several hybrids.

The Mock Orange of all old gardens is *Syringa coronarius*, the eastern European species. The plant was first cultivated in England before the end of the sixteenth century and was probably one of the first garden shrubs brought to America by the English settlers. It is a medium-sized species often as broad as high. The flowers, too, are of

medium size and faintly tinged with yellow. This shrub has been somewhat neglected since species and hybrids with larger and showier flowers have found their way into gardens. This is unfortunate, for no other *Syringa* equals the old-fashioned Mock Orange in the delicate perfume of its flowers. Varieties of this plant with yellow leaves, with double flowers, and with narrow willow-like leaves can be seen in the Arboretum collection, but none of them have any particular decorative value. Among the American species which should find a place in all gardens are *P. inodorus*, *P. pubescens*, and *P. microphyllus*. The first is a native of the Appalachian Mountain region and grows to the height of six feet; it has arching branches and large, solitary, pure white, cup-shaped, scentless flowers. By some persons it is considered the most beautiful of all Syringas. *P. pubescens*, often called *P. grandiflorus* or *P. latifolius*, is also a plant of the southern Appalachian region. It often grows to the height of twenty feet; the branches are stout and erect; the leaves are broad, and the slightly fragrant flowers are arranged in erect, from five- to ten-flowered racemes. This plant is more common in gardens than the last and when it is in bloom it makes a great show. *P. microphyllus*, which rarely grows more than three feet tall, has slender stems, and leaves and flowers smaller than those of any *Philadelphus* in cultivation. What the flowers lack in size, however, is made up in fragrance which is stronger than that of any other *Syringa* and perfumes the air for a long distance. Unfortunately this shrub, which is one of the most attractive plants of the genus, is not always entirely hardy and was killed to the ground last winter in the Arboretum.

The most distinct and perhaps the handsomest of the Asiatic species in the Arboretum is *Philadelphus purpurascens*, discovered by Wilson in western China. It is a large shrub with long arching stems from which rise numerous branchlets from four to six inches long and spreading at right angles; on these branchlets the flowers are borne on drooping stalks; they are an inch and a half long, with a bright purple calyx and pure white petals which do not spread as they do on most of the species but form a bell-shaped corolla and are exceedingly fragrant. This is one of the handsomest of the shrubs brought from western China to the Arboretum. *Philadelphus Magdalenae* is another Chinese species well worth cultivation. It is a tall broad shrub with arching stems, small dark green leaves and pure white fragrant flowers an inch and a quarter in diameter and arranged in drooping, leafy, many-flowered clusters from six to ten inches in length. *Philadelphus pekinensis* from northern China and Mongolia is a stout bush rather broader than high which every year produces great quantities of small flowers tinged with yellow. Another interesting garden plant, *P. Falconeri*, which is certainly Asiatic and probably Japanese, has narrow lanceolate leaves and fragrant flowers in from one- to six-flowered racemes, and is distinct in the shape of its leaves and in its long narrow petals. The origin and history of this plant is not known.

Hybrid Philadelphus. The first hybrid *Philadelphus* which attracted attention was raised in France before 1870 by a Monsieur Billard, and is sometimes called in gardens *Souvenir de Billard*, although the correct

1922. "Philadelphus." *Bulletin of popular information - Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University* 8(11), 41–42. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.321240>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/216933>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.321240>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/321240>

Holding Institution

Harvard University Botany Libraries

Sponsored by

BHL-SIL-FEDLINK

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.