Andy's Garden

Lilacs

Lilacs are hardy, easy to grow, and low maintenance. They can grow from 5 to 15 feet tall, depending on the variety. The fragrant flowers are good for cutting and attractive to butterflies.

Growing
Grow lilacs in fertile, humus-rich soil, well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil. Select a site where your lilac will get full sun, at least 6 hours. If they don't get enough sun they do not bloom well. Make sure the site drains well, they don't like wet feet, and won't bloom well if there is too much water. Plant them in the fall. Space multiple lilac shrubs 5 to 15 feet apart, depending on which variety you're planting.

Care
Each spring, apply a layer of compost under the plant, followed by mulch to retain moisture and control weeds. Water during the summer if rainfall is less than 1 inch per week. Lilacs won't bloom if they're over fertilized. They can handle a handful of 10-10-10 in late winter, but no more.

Pruning Lilacs
Lilacs bloom on old wood, so it's super important to prune in the spring right after they bloom. If you prune later in the summer, you may be removing the wood.

Every year after bloom, remove any dead wood. Prune out the oldest canes. Remove the small suckers. Cut back weak branches to a strong shoot.

Pests
Prone to attack by slugs and snails.

Powder white mildew may appear after a summer of hot, humid weather. It may be unsightly, but it does no harm. Ignore it.

Lilacs attract butterflies!

Wit and Wisdom

To improve the flowering of lilacs, keep the grass from growing around them. A 16- to -24 inch circle of landscape cloth placed around the bushes and covered with bark or stone will keep the grass down.

Force a winter bouquet from cut branches of lilac. Bruise the cut ends and set them in water. Spray the branches frequently. Keep them in a cool place until they bloom, then move to a warmer area for display.

Poet Walt Whitman though of lilacs when Abraham Lincoln died:
"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd . . . I'd mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever returning spring."

Lets Get Growing