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Japanese Tree Lilac (*Syringa reticulata*)

Nebraska Forest Service

The common lilac shrub has long been a staple in both the amateur and professional landscaper's plant palette. Its dark green leaves blending with its fragrant lavender flowers are a favorite of Spring-time landscapes. Lilac lovers prefer the multi-stemmed shrub. But there are those that prefer the single stem, more formal look. The Japanese tree lilac fulfills that need

Often times the Japanese tree lilac (*Syringa reticulata*) is overlooked as a valuable ornamental tree with many similarities to the shrub-form lilac. Although the most popular cultivars of this species have been in the landscape trade for over 25 years, only recently is it finding its way into our landscapes in a more consistent fashion.

The leaves are similar to the common lilac shrub, dark green and oppositely attached to a shiny brown, stout stem. Since the Japanese tree lilac is not native to the United States its range is irregular. The tree is hardy to eastern Nebraska and can also be found west into Colorado and Wyoming and east to the Atlantic Ocean.

The name (*Syringa reticulata*) comes from the Greek "syrinx" (a pipe) for its hollow stems and the Latin "reticulata" meaning networked (veins in the leaf).



When it comes to the flowers of the Japanese tree lilac, the similarities end with the common shrub-form lilac. The tree-form has a creamy-white, large flower in early to mid June that can be up to foot long. It stands out in the landscape with large showy flowers after most other ornamental trees have already flowered. The fragrance of the Japanese tree lilac does not match that of the shrub form, but more than makes up for that shortfall in its appearance. The most common variety of tree lilac is "Ivory Silk".

The Japanese tree lilac can be planted from a container or as a balled and burlapped specimen and is adaptable to high soil pH and prefers full sun. The Japanese tree lilac, with its mature height at around 20 feet, can be planted in tighter landscape areas around the house and close to utility lines that are 30 feet or more above the ground.

(Credit to the Colorado Tree Coalition)