

Pruning keeps lilacs blooming each year

By Cortney Moore

After a long, cool spring a sure sign that warmer weather is on its way has appeared. The lilacs are blooming.

Plump buds pop open in clusters of purple blossoms and unleash a fragrance that is heavenly. Lilacs are a classic landscape shrub.

As settlers made their way west, they often planted lilacs to symbolize hope when the showy spectacle of flowers emerged in the spring.



Lilacs do well in the Tahoe basin.

Photo/Cortney Moore

Lilacs still thrive on some of these abandoned homesteads without any care, making them some of the oldest and one of the toughest bushes in the flora world.

Lilacs have numerous applications from a natural looking bush, to a trimmed hedge or even a manicured, sheared shrub. There is room for a lilac or two in every yard.

Full sun is necessary for healthy plants and optimal bloom.

Shaded areas will lead to reduced bloom, weak growth and increase the chance of powdery mildew.

Lilacs are tolerant of most soil, but will not tolerate standing water. Moist, well-drained soil is preferred. Lilacs need adequate water while they are establishing their root system, and require more water when buds are forming during the summer months.

Fertilizer is not a necessity with lilacs and heavy application of nitrogen may reduce bloom. Adding organic matter to your soil or fertilizing with a product low in nitrogen and higher in phosphorous is better for lilacs.

Lilacs bloom on old wood which means they will set buds on the current season's growth and these buds will bloom next season. Prune immediately after the current season's flowers are spent so new buds form and are not removed by late pruning.

If your lilac is not blooming you may want to pay attention to when you are pruning.

Once the lilac bush is well established, pruning old growth may be necessary to rejuvenate the shrub and promote optimal bloom. This type of pruning is different from pruning the spent flowers. Look at the shrub and determine which canes are the oldest, remove one-third of the oldest canes cutting out at the base of the plant. New growth will fill in and keep the plant fresh and healthy.

Lilacs also add beauty to your home as cut flowers. Clip a few stems and place in a vase of water to fill your home with a sweet summery perfume.

After blooms fade, lilacs add a soft quality to the landscape with their heart shaped matte green leaves. Lilacs are considered a medium to large landscape shrub. Plant them where they have room to grow and enjoy watching them mature into bushes loaded with blooms year after year.

The hardy nature and versatility of lilacs makes them a great choice for planting in the Tahoe Basin. Planting lilacs this season will give you something to look forward to after a cold, snowy winter or a long, cool spring that decides to hang around until summer shows up.

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