

LILAC COLLECTIONS

The following gardens, compiled by Patricia A. Taylor, feature substantial lilac collections that are open to the public. Many contain rare lilacs that may be difficult to find in the trade.

Northeast

Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

Home to the National Collection of Lilacs and the nation's leading center for lilac research, the Arboretum features over three acres of lilacs. Blooms among the 380 lilac plants open from late April into June and are at their height during the popular Lilac Sunday in May.

Highland Botanical Park

Rochester, New York

Among the nation's first municipal arboretums, Highland Park's world famous lilac collection – the largest in the United States – was started in 1892 by horticulturist John Dunbar, later known in local circles as Johnny Lilacseed, with descendants of native Balkan mountain plants brought over by early colonists. Today, there are over 1200 lilacs, representing more than 500 lilac varieties. Many of these, including the unique but sadly rare 'Rochester', were bred by park horticulturists over the past century. The park's annual Lilac Festival in May draws visitors from around the world.

McLaughlin Garden

South Paris, Maine

In 1936, Bernard McLaughlin, a self-taught horticulturist, started creating one of the largest private collections of lilacs in New England. At his death in 1995, the garden was preserved as a nonprofit. Open to the public from May to October, the garden holds a Lilac Festival in May.

New Jersey State Botanical Garden at Skylands

Ringwood, New Jersey

When he acquired his New Jersey estate in 1922, Clarence Lewis immediately set out to create a botanical showplace. As part of that effort, he searched the world for plants and in the process acquired over 200 lilacs. The collection was maintained over the decades and the State has continued to do so after acquiring the property in 1966. Today, there are over 100 varieties in the collection and the bloom period extends from late April into June.

New York Botanical Garden

Bronx, New York

The garden's lilac collection is currently undergoing a major renovation and expansion with the addition of more than 200 new lilacs. This on-going project, open for viewing and enjoyment now, will be completed in 2016.

Syringa Plus

Hooksett, New Hampshire

This commercial nursery contains a collection of 250 lilac species and cultivars, many not in the trade. The grounds are open to the public for Lilac Walks during weekends in May.

Northwest

Hulda Klager Lilac Gardens

Woodland, Washington

Now a national historic site, the gardens feature a lilac collection that includes those introduced by Hulda Klager, an amateur breeder. At the Gardens, the three weeks prior to and including Mother's Day are known as lilac days and provide visitors time to not only see the collection in bloom but also to buy many of the lilacs.

The Lilac Garden in Duniway Park

Portland, Oregon

Located atop a former landfill and surrounded by steep hillsides covered with fir and cedar, the Lilac Garden features about 225 plants representing 125 varieties that bloom from late March to early May. The majority had been grown by B.O. Case, a nurseryman from southeastern Washington. When Case died in 1936, the Portland Garden Club made his collection a gift to the city.

Midwest

Ewing Park Lilac Arboretum and Children's Forest

Des Moines, Iowa

Opened in 1947 and at its height containing 1500 lilacs representing 500 varieties, the arboretum was devastated by a flash fire in 1967. A major renovation, including the addition of many new lilacs, was recently completed.

Holden Arboretum

Kirtland, Ohio

Holden's lilac collection was first planted in 1939 and many of the original plantings continue to thrive. Currently, there are about 200 lilac specimens located in the Display Garden.

Lilacia Park

Lombard, Illinois

Established in 1910 as a private garden by two Lombard residents who had visited the Lemoine nursery in France and returned with cuttings, the eight-and-a-half acre grounds were deeded to the city as a public park in 1927. Today, Lilacia Park features more than 200 varieties of lilacs.

Lola and Milton Flack Lilac Collection

Maxwell Arboretum at University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska

Started in 1981, the collection has been enhanced with the support and plant contributions of noted Nebraskan lilac breeders, among them the Petersons of Meadowlark Hill Garden.

Meadowlark Hill Garden

Ogallala, Nebraska

Comprising more than 850 lilacs planted in a 14-acre area, Max and Darlene Peterson's monumental work started in 1966. It is open to the public at the height of fragrant bloom time in May.

Sunny Fields

Emmett, Michigan

More than 300 cultivars, many rare ones acquired through International Lilac Society members, make up the collection begun by Bill Horman in the 1970s at this 40-acre botanical park. Sunny Fields hosts an annual two-day Lilac Festival in April.

West Coast

Descanso Gardens

La Canada Flintridge, California

Lilac breeding had been carried out at Descanso Gardens both when the complex was a private estate and when it became a Los Angeles public park. Known in the trade as Descanso hybrids, these lilacs are especially suited to southern California climates. The gardens contain these hybrids as well as 250 other lilac cultivars and are at their peak from mid-March to the end of April.