

Why lilacs don't bloom

HOW DID YOUR LILACS DO THIS SPRING? Mine were the best they've ever been, but according to Mark Dallas, who runs Galetta Nurseries in the far west end of Ottawa, that has more to do with Mother Nature and just plain dumb luck than with my skills as a gardener. Mark says he gets a lot of calls every Spring from people who want to know why *their* lilacs aren't blooming when all around them other people's gardens are filled with scented blossoms. According to Mark there are many reasons why this can happen. Here are some of them...

- ⌘ Not enough sun. Lilacs need six or more hours of sun a day.
- ⌘ Too much nitrogen. Lilacs prefer a less fertile soil. Don't use chemical fertilizers on them.
- ⌘ Poorly drained soil. Lilacs grow best in ditches along the side of roads: damp but well-drained. They don't like to dry out or to be soaked all the time.
- ⌘ Poor pruning. Lilacs should only be pruned after they have flowered. If you haven't already pruned your lilacs, now would be a good time.
- ⌘ Variety. Most of what we think of as "native" lilacs are originally from Europe. They bloom in late May or early June, but some varieties are much later — the Preston Lilacs that grow along the 417 for example — and Japanese lilacs usually wait until the end of June.
- ⌘ Winter cold. Flower buds on lilacs form during the previous year and, in a bitterly cold winter, the flower buds will die off. This past winter was very mild, so there were lots of flowers this year. The winter before was vicious, so there were far fewer flowers.

Note: Mark adds that there are about 4000 different varieties of lilacs, and about 200 distinct species. If you are looking to plant lilacs, he recommends you try to find some of the Preston series. These lilacs were developed in Ottawa, are exceptionally hardy, and tolerate the worst growing conditions. Here's an interesting Web site about them, and about Isabella Preston, one of Canada's most famous plant developers.
http://collections.ic.gc.ca/BotanicalGarden/varieties_preston.html.