PLANT ALERT

Public Gardens *as* Sentinels *against* Invasive Plants

Japanese tree lilac

Syringa reticulata

ISSUED SEPTEMBER 2025

Japanese tree lilac has been identified by the PGSIP working group as a plant of concern due to a growing number of botanic gardens and arboreta reporting on its ability to escape from cultivation.

Public gardens across North America are sharing their horticultural expertise to document cases of plants escaping from cultivation. The goal of this alert is to increase awareness of gardens' observations about Japanese tree lilac's behavior within their properties and to recommend actions to reduce its capacity to spread. For more information visit the PGSIP website.

Recommended Actions

PGSIP urges these next steps for propagators, nurseries, landscape architects, invasive plant councils, and public gardens.

- Increase public garden monitoring and reporting
- Eradicate spontaneous populations
- Develop and evaluate cultivars for reduced fertility

Public gardens Sign up for PGSIP here

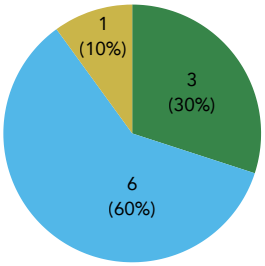
Share feedback on this Alert

Not a public garden? Share data here

Data from PGSIP Gardens

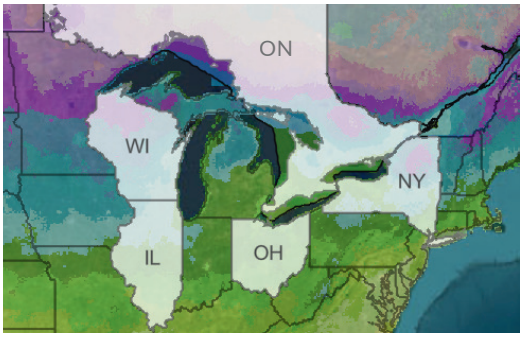
Ten out of 66 gardens have used the PGSIP guidelines to record and rank Japanese tree lilac according to its ability to escape from cultivation. Three records specify a subspecies or cultivar (*S. reticulata* subsp. *reticulata* 'Elliot', subsp. *reticulata* 'Ivory Silk', and subsp. *amurensis*). A regional trend is emerging with gardens reporting from Illinois, Ohio, New York, Wisconsin, and Ontario. Japanese tree lilac has not been recognized as invasive in the scientific invasive literature and there is concern that it may be an overlooked, potentially invasive, taxon. Click on the map below for current PGSIP records.

How Gardens Ranked Japanese Tree Lilac



Number and percentage of gardens that assigned each program ranking

CLICK HERE	Watchlist
CLICK HERE	Potentially Invasive
CLICK HERE	Invasive
CLICK HERE	Assessed as Invasive



Click map to visit the PGSIP Data Dashboard

Japanese tree lilac *Syringa reticulata*

Background Information

- **BRIEF DESCRIPTION:** Small tree (20-30'). Leaves are oppositely arranged, lanceolate to ovate with sharp tips. Bark has prominent horizontal lenticels. Young bark is reddish-brown and peels, turning gray with age. Flowers in upright, 10-12" panicles[1]. Fruits are clusters of warty, dry, green-yellow capsules that persist through the winter[2].
- **HARDINESS ZONES:** 3-6
- **NATIVE RANGE:** Northern China, Korea, and Japan
- **STATUS:** Not currently regulated
- **REDUCED FEDUNDITY CULTIVAR:** Snowdance™
- **POTENTIAL IMPACTS:** Plants that escape cultivation can dominate natural areas, shading out native understory plants[3,4].


Bark with lenticels, Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

Unique Features

Similar in appearance to other lilac species, but has a tree-like, rather than shrubby habit and is typically larger at maturity than common lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris*)[4]. Showy white flowers bloom in late spring/early summer, later than most other lilac species[1].


Opposite leaves, Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

Habitat

Tolerates a wide range of site conditions. PGSIP gardens have reported *S. reticulata* spreading into other garden beds and managed natural areas, as well as into fence lines and edge areas. Invasive Species Management groups in New York have found it escaping cultivation and invading riparian corridors and floodplains[3,4].


Kris R. Bachtell, The Morton Arboretum

Reproduction and Growth Rate

Reproduces by seed with more than 25% of seed germinating the next growing season[5]. Winged seeds may travel long distances (>100m) aided by wind. Naturalized populations have been found in riparian areas[3,4], so seed dispersal by water may be a factor.


Fruits, Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

References and Links

1 - Missouri Botanical Garden
2 - North Carolina State University Extension
3 - Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program
4 - Long Island Invasive Species Management Area
5 - Plant Risk Evaluator (PRE) Evaluation Reports: Illinois, Minnesota

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