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## ***Syringa afghanica* and *S. pinetorum*: a misidentification alert<sup>1</sup>**

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Material under two different lilac species names is being grown in gardens but both names are not correctly applied to the plants in cultivation. The following note draws attention to the confusion.

Those who come across these misidentified plants are asked not just to update the label and the record, but if the records show the origin of the plant, to contact the people who supplied you with it to alert them to the problem. This should help to remove an erroneous name from collections and commercial nurseries, and perhaps before the real *Syringa afghanica* and *S. pinetorum* enter our gardens.

### ***Syringa afghanica* C.K. Schneid.**

To our, albeit limited, knowledge true-to-name *Syringa afghanica* has not yet been introduced to cultivation, either in Europe or in North America. Plants in cultivation under the name *S. afghanica* mostly turn out to be *S. × laciniata* Mill. Pringle (1978) published a detailed review of the literature on *S. afghanica* and the sources of the existing confusion. Alas, thirty years later the confusion still exists.

Schneider (1903) described and named *Syringa afghanica*, basing his description on herbarium specimens collected in Afghanistan in 1870 by James Aitchison.

A good description of *Syringa afghanica* appears in the current online version of the *Flora of Pakistan*, namely:

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Shrub with spreading, lenticellate branches. Leaves entire, 1–3cm long, 2–8mm broad (on fertile branches), lanceolate to narrowly oval, almost sessile. Inflorescence dense, of almost capitate appearance at the ends of branchlets, the leafless panicles arising from subterminal (terminal) and uppermost lateral buds only. Calyx 1–2mm long, more or less distinctly 4-toothed. Corolla lilac, tube cylindric, 8–10mm long, lobes c. half the length, oval. Capsule ovoid to cylindric, c. 1cm long, 4mm in diameter, slightly bent, acuminate, opening into 2 halves.

The most significant statement here is that the leaves of *Syringa afghanica* are entire. The foliage of *S. × laciniata* and that of one of its parents, *S. protolaciniata*, is 3- to 9-parted to -divided or entire, and *S. × persica* may have the occasional lobed or laciniate leaf. It is these three taxa that may turn up under the label of *Syringa afghanica*; therefore the leaf-shape is the key characteristic in spotting the misidentifications. Additional sources of confusion are the common names applied to *S. protolaciniata* and its cultivar 'Kabul'; both are occasionally listed as Afghan lilac or Afghanistan lilac.

When searching the Internet for the name *Syringa afghanica* hundreds of web pages turn up. Many of these pages are accompanied by photographs or descriptions which show or describe deeply lobed foliage. To the careful observer it immediately becomes clear that we are dealing with misidentifications. True-to-name *Syringa afghanica* does not have any lobate or parted leaves.

### ***Syringa pinetorum* W.W. Sm.**

McKelvey (1928) indicated that *Syringa pinetorum* had not yet been introduced to cultivation; Fiala (1988) repeated it; Pringle (1990) confirmed it; and Green (1995) stated it once more. They also explained why there are still plants in collections and nurseries growing under the name of *Syringa pinetorum*. In 1914 George Forrest made the type collection in the Lichiang Range in Yunnan of what was described as the new species *Syringa pinetorum* (Smith,

1916). Seed under this name, collected by Forrest was subsequently distributed from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. From the accessions records of the Arnold Arboretum (M. Dosmann, pers. comm.), seed originally under the name *S. pinetorum* was received there in early 1923 and again in 1924. Both accessions were redetermined as *Syringa yunnanensis* Franch. Since the original collection in 1914 was made when the lilac was in flower, it seems likely that no seed was collected then. Later collections under the name *S. pinetorum* must have been made during Forrest's 1921–22 expedition and would have been distributed in 1923/4. Unfortunately no collection numbers have been traced so it cannot be proved that this is the source of the confusion. Some collection curators recognised the error and updated their records accordingly; some realised they had *S. yunnanensis*, others were puzzled, or careful, changing the label to *Syringa* sp., or "unknown lilac", but some gardens and commercial nurseries perpetuated the error by distributing plants under the erroneous name.

Below is the description of *Syringa yunnanensis*, which may be of help in determining what one has, or does not have, under the name of *Syringa pinetorum*.

### ***Syringa yunnanensis***

Shrubs 2–5m. Branchlets terete or slightly four-angled, usually glabrous. Petiole 0.5–2cm, glabrous; leaf blade elliptic, elliptic-lanceolate, to oblanceolate, 2–8(–13) × 1–3.5(–5.5)cm, glabrous or abaxially rarely pubescent along veins, base cuneate or rarely subrounded, apex acute or short acuminate. Panicles erect, terminal, 5–18 × 3–12cm; rachis and pedicel puberulent or rarely lanose. Pedicel 0.5–1.5mm. Calyx 1–2.5mm, glabrous or rarely lanose. Corolla white to lilac-red, 0.7–1.2(–1.7)cm; tube funnelform, 5–8(–13)mm; lobes oblong, spreading. Anthers yellow, usually inserted up to 2mm from mouth of corolla tube. Capsule oblong, 1.2–1.7cm, slightly lenticellate. Flowering May to June, fruiting in September. (Chang & Green, 1996).

This species is clearly distinct from true *S. pinetorum* as it has a terminal inflorescence and *S. pinetorum* has lateral inflorescences.

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