

Cultivation method according to Jan!

The cultivation of the lilac is a two-year cultivation. In most cases a young shrub is purchased that is one year old. The shrub is then grown into a large shrub in six to seven years, pruned and transplanted annually. This allows the shrub to fully grow fully with firm roots, and a nice shape. The structure and root ball are very important for the quality of the branches. After six to seven years, the shrub is ready to start with it's first two-year cycle from field to flowering in the greenhouse.

When the bush gets to the greenhouse for the first time, it's always exciting to find out what the composition and color of the flowers are, how long the vase life is and how it is received by the buyers at the auction. It takes seven years to find out! If Jan is convinced that the variety has sufficient good qualities to be a valuable addition to his wide assortment, the plant will be returned to the field in the spring and it will start to run the two-year cycle. If after the first seven years it turns out to be a shrub that has no added value, Jan takes his loss and throws it out.

When the bush is brought to the field, the field has already been prepared with a fresh layer of mud that has been removed from the bottom of the Aalsmeer Westeinderplas. This happens every two years. They let the mud dry for a winter, after which the field is prepared by digging and milling. It then provides a good breeding ground on which the shrub with its root ball can recover well from its first flowering trip to the greenhouse.

The bush now wants to make new fresh roots as quickly as possible to absorb the nutrients. The shrub will also grow again above ground again, but without flower buds. The bushes are then pruned in the fall. Pruning mainly means thinning, so that an optimal shape of the bush, this is called the crown, remains on which beautiful flowers can grow. In order to lend a helping hand to optimal growth, they determine how many branches it can produce per bush, by leaving the maximum number of shoots on the bush. These shoots will grow little buds which will open when the spring sun wakes the bush from its winter rest.

To ensure that the bush grows branches of the desired quality, the extra shoots are removed. This is called 'plucking'. Now all nutrients are transported to the branches which can grow optimally.

For a good growth of the new branches, we need calm weather of around 20 degrees Celsius, with a little bit of rain during the night, so that there is enough water in the soil to bring nutrients to the branches and let them grow. Unfortunately ideal weather is not something you can order. We have to deal with all kinds of weather. When it storms, the branches are often heavily damaged. The shoots must be protected, by growing them on support mesh. Nets are stretched above all the bushes, which provide sufficient protection during the short but intense growth period of the branches. Hail also sometimes occurs in the spring. If the hail stones are large enough, they can destroy the entire harvest for the coming season within 1 minute. This is something you can't take precautions against. If the hail falls, then there is damage and you can only hope that the bush will recover. If the damage is too great, there is also a chance that the bush will not survive at all. Then all those years have been wasted. But it's

wishful thinking to trust that the weather conditions will be optimal every year for the growth of beautiful, sturdy, long branches.

When the branches are long enough, it is important to force the bush to create flower buds from which the flowers will grow in the following spring. The weather conditions are important again. Jan wants at least two flower clusters at each and every branch and preferably a multiple thereof. This requires a longer period of drought and heat. During that time the bush is being stressed, giving it the feeling that it is dying. This is done by manually disconnecting the root ball from the soil. The bush then lacks the ability to extract water and nutrients from the soil, making the bush go into survival mode.

Here again, the weather plays an important role. If it is too hot and too dry, the bush will die because of the lack of water. If it is too cold and too wet, then everything you try to make the bush stressed will not work. This is therefore always a difficult phase for the grower and that is why every season is different.

After the two-week period of planting the flower bud have been formed, as a grower you can only wait and hope that everything has worked out. The shrub then wants to recover from the stress situation and creates new roots again, so that enough nutrients and water can be extracted from the soil to make the branches grow thicker.

After flowering

In the month of September we the bushes will be removed from the soil by hand to prepare them for the trip by boat to the storage area outside the greenhouse. They are transported in the month of October. The fields are then emptied and given a fresh layer of mud, which is full of nutrients.

The early flowering lilacs in the garden can go into the greenhouse as of mid-November. The medium or late flowering lilacs will be put in the greenhouse mid-January or February. That is why in the beginning only one or two varieties of lilacs are sold at the auction and more varieties are available in January.

In the greenhouse we try to make the bush think it's spring. We bring the temperature in the greenhouse to 'spring temperature'. When a variety enters the greenhouse for the first time, it is always unsure if the bush is really ready to get out of its winter rest. This too has everything to do with the weather conditions in the fall. If the bush does not feel like "waking up" yet, you will get a lot of A2 quality and therefore a yield that is not sufficient for the work that you put into it for two years. But when the bush is ready to face spring, it will flower. The leaf shoots take away a lot of nutrients that should go to the development of the flower so they are removed manually.

After plucking it takes about seven days until the first branches are ripe enough to harvest. The further the flower has opened on the bush, the better the flowering and shelf life. As soon as the first branches are cut from the bush, the other branches are all ripe enough to be harvested within three days. The beautiful long branches are cut first. Because these are slightly warmer, they always have thicker stems and they also have the best quality. The remaining branches are auctioned under A2 quality.

Every day after being cut the branches are immediately put on water. The buckets full of branches are then brought to the sorting shed where the branches are checked and assessed by hand. The machine then determines the length of the stems in steps of 10 cm.

During and after sorting, the branches first go back in the buckets of water after which they are bunched together. While bunching a final check is done. Here the grading is assessed once more and bunches of ten branches are made.

A bag of shrub-cut flower food is hung on the bunch, so the florists can give the flowers the best treatment in their shop or processing room. There is also a unique label on the same branch that Jan attaches to every bunch; he is the only lilac grower who does this. Jan mainly does this for the information that can be read via the QR code on your mobile phone, in order to provide buyers / end customers. It contains important information about how the lilac can best be put on the vase so the flourishing 'pearl' can be enjoyed as long as possible.

After sorting, the lilacs are put in cold storage overnight. The branches can now fill up with water and nutrients under ideal conditions. It also gives Jan the opportunity to make the stock available to his buyers. He then places all types, lengths and qualities on the virtual marketplace which is directly linked to the web shops of his customers. He is therefore a strong proponent of selling lilacs straight out of cold storage and sending them the next morning to the customer who, for example, has bought a bucket. He sends the rest of the stock to the auction at the same time. There they are placed in the supply for next day's auction. Putting lilacs in cold storage is no problem at all and does not affect the vase life. Especially if they go on dry transport, it certainly is an advantage. The branches are then filled with water and well cooled.

The full-grown bush

Now that the branches are being used in beautiful arrangements all over the world, it is time for the bush to make its well-deserved journey back to the greenhouse, so Jan can pamper it and encourage it to show its most beautiful branches and flowers again in two years.

If all goes well it will be possible to make that same rotation with the bush at least 50 times. There are shrubs that are 100 years old. Unfortunately, bushes cannot talk. But Jan hopes that if the bush is large, mature and aged, she would say the following:

“This lilac specialist, who took care of me passionately and did not stand in the way of my development, should know what it’s like now. Do you remember that he was so busy creating the optimal conditions for us? He did everything in his power to make us shine again every two years as a unique Pearl. He was already convinced we would. Starting selling to his customers using web shops was a bull's-eye. As a result, I continued to live as a lilac bush and every two years I allowed many people to experience a moment of emotional memories. But if he could see how my beautiful branches are being treated at this time, he would be so proud and he will have absolutely no regrets about all his hard work. His blood, sweat and tears really contributed to helping me grow into the bush I am today. Yours truly,

The Full-grown Bush!"