

St. Vincent's Lilac Vine (AKA: Italian Jasmine, Potato Vine)

Solanum seaforthianum

Growing Instructions



This is a well behaved shrubby climber that has lovely lilac flowers followed by bright red round fruits that are attractive to birds. Root hardy to zone 8b and warmer, it can easily be container grown in northern climates. These will bloom the first year from seed if seed is started in the spring. This vine takes trimming well if you want to keep it bushy, but really doesn't need much attention otherwise; won't overtake your other plants that are near it.

It is not unusual for the leaves to be wilted from the long, hot trip; if any are too wilted to recover, simply remove them; more leaves will form as the vine grows. If you don't have time to plant it right away, place the plant (still in its original container) in a pan of cool water (about 2" deep) to help it recover from the trip. When you are ready to plant it, remove it from the Styrofoam container it is in before planting.

If you will be growing your vine in a container I would suggest using a 2 or 3 gallon container that has good drainage because once the vine starts climbing, it will be difficult to re-pot it to a larger container. Be sure to supply a trellis for climbing.

If you will be growing in the ground (root hardy to zone 8b), set it out in the yard or garden on fence or arbor after all danger of frost has past. These grow well in bright shade or part sun (full sun in more northern areas). Fertilize monthly during the growing season with a balanced fertilizer or, if in a container, weekly with a water soluble fertilizer.

In either case (Ground or container), don't plant deeper than the original soil line. Plant using a well draining soil mix so that water does not stand on the roots; this plant has average moisture needs, don't overwater or allow the soil to remain constantly wet. Water when the soil is dry or you notice wilting of the leaves.

After the blooms will come green berries which will turn to bright red when they are ripe. The birds like to eat the berries, but if you can beat the birds to them, you can extract the seeds from these berries and plant them for more vines in subsequent years. Some people just plant the whole berry (I suggest you 'squish' it first before planting to make it easier for the seedlings to get out), there are usually 5-10 seeds in each berry and, if planted whole, the seeds will sprout in a 'clump' – these can be divided or thinned when they are large enough to handle.

