



Although they are native to China, crape myrtles have become an icon for the South (and yes, that gets a capital “S”...because it is a specific place). The original crapes, *Lagerstroemia indica*, were very prone to powdery mildew. Since 1956, breeders have been crossing them with *Lagerstroemia faurei* (from Japan) and from there on out, crape myrtles became a whole new tree. The crapes we see today are the result of combining the brilliant colors of the *indicas* with the disease resistance and beautiful exfoliating bark of the *faureis*.

Breeding programs have developed crapes for every situation, from stately shade trees to practically a ground cover, and in colors from pure white through every shade of pink, deep reds and purples. Tack on a long blooming season and you can see why crapes are so popular.

How to select a Crape Myrtle:

After you answer a few questions, it will be easy to select the right variety.

- What color do you want?
- What shape do you want?
- How tall do you want it to get?
- Do you have the right location?

Step 1: Color is a subjective thing and it is always the first thing we think about. If you are starting with a blank slate, then you can pretty much pick any color you want and build off that. If you’re adding to a landscape, you might want to take into consideration the colors of your existing plants and what time of year they are in bloom. With so many colors to choose from, you’re sure to find one you will love.

STEP 2: Shape Yes, crapes have natural shapes. Some are shaped like Olive Oyl, tall and skinny others are shaped more like Wimpy, with a fuller figure. Some look like a small weeping willow and others are the Y...in the YMCA dance...it’s a mixed group.

- **Upright or vase:** the plant taller than it is wide.
- **Rounded or globose:** the plant is as wide as it is tall.
- **Spreading:** the plant is wider than it is tall.
- **Weeping:** the plant is naturally small and should rarely be pruned.
- **Columnar:** the plant is very narrow and upright.

Step 3: Size Crapes are grouped into categories by size. They are:

- **Miniature:** usually under 3-feet tall and takes on a “weeping” shape.
- **Dwarf:** these are usually 3- to 6-feet tall and make great hedges.
- **Intermediate:** between 6- and 12-feet tall, use as a tall hedge, or as a specimen or accent.
- **Tree or Tall:** typically over 15-feet tall, use as an accent or for some real shade.
- **Step 3: Size** Crapes are grouped into categories by size. They are:





Step 3: Size Continued

Visualizing the mature size in the landscape will help you decide which category you want. Trying to force a particular variety to stay shorter is **not** advised...unless you are trying to create a bonsai. Repeated attempts to control the height of a crape is “*Crape Murder*”.

If you want a crape in front of your home, it needs to be planted at least half the diameter of the mature canopy, away from the wall. For example; if the mature size is 20-feet wide, then you should plant it at least 10-feet from the wall. This allows the crape to achieve its mature size and shape, with very little pruning and allows for good air flow around it. Planting a tree that wants to be 30-feet tall 3 feet from your foundation is a rookie mistake. We see it all the time, and we just shake our heads.

Step 4 Site Imagine standing in the middle of the road, on the highest section of the 610/59 interchange...this situation would be considered FULL SUN and a crape myrtle would love it.

“Mostly” or “quite” sunny, will not cut it. Cutting off a crape’s branches to get more blooms is “*Crape Murder*”.

Oh, they will survive in less than 8 hours of DIRECT SUN, but they won’t be happy, vigorous or full of leaves. In less than 8 hours of DIRECT SUN, they will get powdery mildew and aphids. On top of all that, we plant crapes because we like the flowers, and for a crape to flower means 8 hours of DIRECT SUN. Trust me on this; I had a crape that has never threw more than a few flowers a year (threats apparently didn’t work and it knew my threats were empty). As of 2013 this tree started to get 8 hours of sun and blooms beautifully!

Air circulation is the next consideration in choosing a planting site. Cross off all ideas of planting a crape against a fence, a wall or beside a tall hedge. They need excellent air flow and anything that hinders air flow will cause your crape problems. Poor air circulation leads to powdery mildew. The powdery mildew fungus, is a climatic event, triggered when we have hot, humid days and cool nights in the spring and fall. Some varieties are more susceptible than other, so select varieties that have proven themselves in your area.

One other word of warning, if you have a pool... unless you find that cleaning your pool is the best way for you to relax; you really should avoid planting a crape near it.

When planting a crape myrtle, follow our Tree Planting Guide.

It works on every tree and our own planting crew uses this method.

Follow our First Year Tree Care Guide for basic watering and care.





Question: It looks like there is white powder on the leaves and flower buds.

Answer: Powdery mildew is a fungus triggered during specific climatic conditions (hot, humid days and cool nights) in the spring and fall. Act quickly using a fungicide (like Mancozeb) to prevent damage to the flower buds. Multiple sprayings may be needed, until the weather changes.

Question: My leaves are sticky and my car/patio/dog is too.

Answer: Aphids, scale or mealy bugs are the culprit here. The sticky substance is called “honey dew”...face it, it’s bug poop. Control the insects and the problem will go away. Use Dominion, a systemic insecticide (it is the same thing as Bayer Tree and Shrub and we can sell it for less) in late February. It is a mix-and-pour product, making application easy, quick and not messy. One application will prevent bugs for about 9 months. This is one of the situations where we suggest preventative chemical applications. Spray several times in the winter with All Seasons Oil Spray.

Question: My leaves are turning black and my car/patio/dog is too.

Answer: If you wait too long to treat the bugs in the previous paragraph, the “honey dew” grows a fungus call Black Sooty Mold. Get rid of the bugs, and the problem goes away. If the situation is allowed to continue, it will be near impossible to get it off the leaves. When the leaves drop on the fall, it will go away, but be proactive in the spring and treat with Dominion in February.

Question: The tips of my leaves are turning brown and crunchy.

Answer: Too much water is the problem here. Crapees are drought tolerant. Cut back on the water and follow our First Year Tree Care Guide.

Question: Why won’t my crape bloom?

Answer: Not enough sun. Read the section above about site.

Question: What do I do about the little sprouts popping out of the trunk?

Answer: Keep cutting them off, close to the trunk. If you catch them early, you can brush them off with your hand.

Question: Can I make this multi trunk tree into a single trunk tree?

Answer: Yes and no. Yes if you start with a very young tree. Pick a 1 or 5 gallon size that has a single, straight trunk or one that has one really good trunk and a few puny ones you can remove. Keep the suckers pruned off and stake it to keep it straight. It is a lot of work, but the results can be stunning.

If you already have a multi-trunk tree, learn to love it, or replace it. If you remove all the extra trunks, they will constantly try to resprout. If you try to poison them, it will kill the one you want to keep, because the roots have all grown together.

Question: Why is my crape dying?

Answer: Do you use weed and feed that has Atrazine in it? Most weed and feeds have this chemical in them, read the label. It says right on the bag “do not use on the root zone of desirable trees”. Since the roots of your trees extend under the grass, up to 3 times the width of the canopy, chances are you are poisoning your trees...and frogs, toads, lizards, cat, dog, kids and yourself. Atrazine is monitored in our water...and is probably as bad as DDT.





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Space for your Mumbles N' Scribbles

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