



*L to r, Linda Gay, correctly-pruned tree crape myrtles and 'Natchez' crape's gorgeous exfoliating trunk*

## **IF YOU CAN'T STOP COMMITTING "CMurder" AT LEAST JUST STOP PLANTING CRAPE MYRTLES**

***By Linda Gay***

**Horticulturist & Gardener**

The way crape myrtles look in February and March is a travesty (a distorted representation of a tree) and a tragedy (an event causing great suffering destruction and distress). The way trees get brutally whacked and chopped by loppers and saws, **it would be better if we just stopped planting them!**



***Tree crapes don't normally need pruning at all. Lopping them across the top, left, results in weak branch sprouts that can't support the new growth, resulting in problems later in the summer***



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**HOW DID CRAPE MURDER GET STARTED?** It was said removing seed heads in winter improved blooming. But it was so time consuming to snip so many tips, it was easier to just whack the whole thing back.

If your crapees are too tall, pull them out and plant shorter varieties. Tree crape myrtles rarely or never need pruning. Tree crape myrtles grow tall - 20-40.'

Crapees have been lovingly referred to as the Lilac of the South -- no fragrance but a very long summer bloom time, with wonderful exfoliating bark in late spring/early summer. As a kid, I loved to peel off the trunk to reveal a beautiful, velvety, cinnamon colored trunk. Leaves provide great fall color from yellow to orange to red if weather cooperates.

So here we have a plant that give us an exceptionally long summer bloom period, great fall foliage (not many trees do that here) and a beautiful sculptured trunk **when allowed to grow naturally**.

Two types of crape are frequently planted:

- ***Lagerstroemia indica*** - small round leaves. Terribly susceptible to powdery mildew, a white powder that causes distorted leaves in spring and fall.
- ***Lagerstroemia hybrid*** (*indica* x *fauriei*). These National Arboretum hybrids are totally resistant to powdery mildew. They're often called Indian Tribe Hybrids. These are the result of Dr. Donald Egolf's research project started in 1959. The hybrid crape is easily distinguished from (*L. indica*) by its larger rectangle leaves, larger flowers and flower clusters and total resistance to powdery mildew

Familiar National Arboretum hybrids include:

- Muskogee - to 30' - light lavender - red orange fall color
- Tuscarora - to 20' - dark coral pink - red orange fall color
- Natchez - to 30' - white - cinnamon colored trunk - yellow to red to orange fall color
- Arapaho - 20-30' - true red - maroon tinged leaves
- Fantasy - 25-40' - white, fragrance emits a sweet nectar for bees, cinnamon trunk

  
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***L to r: 'Muskogee,' 'Tuscarora,' 'Natchez,' 'Arapaho.' and 'Fantasy'***

If you do not have space for a 20'-30' tree, try a shrub or dwarf variety. Great ones include:

- Chickasaw - 1-3' shrub - light lavender pink
- Chica - 2-4' shrub - deep red
- Pokomoke - 3-5' shrub - deep rose pink
- Hopi - 5-10' large shrub - clear light pink
- Dynamite - 6-8' dense shrub - true red
- Acoma - 6-10' - white- semi- dwarf weeping habit
- Catawba - 8-10' - violet purple - dense shrub



***L to r above: 'Chickasaw,' 'Chica' and 'Pokomoke.'***  
***Below: 'Hopi,' 'Dynamite,' 'Acoma' and 'Catawba'***

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**CRAPE MYRTLE TIPS:**

1. Do not plant tall varieties in flower beds next to the house. Use tree crapes in the middle of the yard to provide summer shade on the west side of the house.
2. Crape Myrtles are either single trunk or multi-trunked. It can take a long time to turn a multi trunk into a single trunk, so purchase single trunk to begin with if that is what you need.
3. Plant ONLY hybrids with the large leaves to avoid powdery mildew in the spring and fall.
4. Crape Myrtles need at least 6 hours of DIRECT SUN for good, long summer bloom.
5. Watch for Crape Myrtle Asian Bark Scale, it turns the trunks completely black and must be treated systemically and topically. Severe pruning seems to attract these sucking insects.
6. Prune ONLY when trees are young to shape the tree by removing crossing and rubbing branches and dead wood.



***Correctly pruned crape myrtles***

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If you have trees that have been chopped down to shoulder or waist height, remove it for it will never be beautiful again.

YOU be the teacher! Help educate those holding the chain saws and pruners to stop the horrible disfiguring of our beautiful sculptured trees.

And remember, NO pruning is necessary if the trees have never been pruned.

Have a great spring!!

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**Note:** You can contact Linda at [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net). I'll be glad to forward emails to her.