

# CRAPEMYRTLE - *Flower of the South*

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Crapeyrrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) is a popular ornamental shrub/small tree for Mississippi landscapes. The colorful clusters of flowers offer a spectacular sight during the heat of summer. The species name, *L. indica*, implies that crapeyrrtle is native to India; however, its origin is China. Commonly called the “Flower of the South,” crapeyrrtle can be used as a specimen plant, a small tree, a patio plant, and a container plant, as well as a shrub border and street tree.

Crapeyrrtles have aesthetic qualities other than their colorful summer flowers. The trunk color is spectacular on many cultivars and ranges from light green-grey to dark red.

The bark on some cultivars peels (exfoliates) in long strands, exposing various colors and creating interesting mottled patterns of light and dark that enhance the winter landscape.

The foliage is another beautiful feature and while green in spring and summer, it offers an array of fall colors ranging from brilliant yellow to deep mahogany.

Seed pods that develop in fall and remain on the plants all winter contrast with exposed linear branches and add another textural feature. These factors combine to make crapeyrrtle an outstanding landscape plant for all seasons.

Crapeyrrtles are hardy through USDA Climatic Zone 7 (0 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit winter temperature). North Mississippi is in Zone 7a, and the Gulf Coast is in Zone 8b. Crapeyrrtles are hardy throughout the state. Even though extremely low winter

temperatures will sometimes kill plants to the ground, they resprout from the roots in spring.

The table below lists the most popular crapeyrrtle cultivars for use in Mississippi.

## Planting

**Location.** Crapeyrrtles have a shallow, fibrous root system and are long lived. They grow and flower best in sunny locations with good air circulation and a well-drained soil. Do not plant crapeyrrtles next to large windows or brick walls where radiated heat encourages late-season growth and makes the plants susceptible to winter injury. Crapeyrrtles grow in partial shade, but flowering is greatly reduced and sometimes totally eliminated.

**Soil.** Crapeyrrtles grow in a wide range of soil types, but they prefer a soil pH range of 5.0 to 6.5. When there is no choice but to plant in a heavy clay soil with poor internal drainage, elevate the planting site; crapeyrrtles do not tolerate their roots remaining in wet soils. Prepare a planting hole three to five times as wide as the root ball of the plant. If lime is required to adjust the pH, mix it thoroughly with the backfill soil. Incorporate a 4-inch layer of pine bark or compost into the soil as a soil amendment. Do not use finely chopped sphagnum peat (peat moss) to amend heavy clay soils.

Sub-surface drainage tiles, “French drains,” may be used to remove excess water from the planting area. Sand is not a good amendment for clay soils unless you use enough to change the texture of a soil to a sandy texture (60 percent by volume). Remember that



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sand and clay make cement.

When planting in sandy soils, adding peat moss is beneficial. Peat moss helps sandy soils retain moisture and fertilizer. Thoroughly mix the peat moss with the backfill soil, making sure not to use more than one-third by volume of peat.

**When To Plant.** Plant container-grown and balled and burlapped plants any time during the year. However, planting in fall or early spring allows time for roots to establish before summer. Plant bare-root plants when dormant.

**How To Plant.** Be careful to set plants in the planting hole at the same depth they grew in the nursery or container. Then mulch the planting site with 4 inches of large bark aggregates, 6 to 8 inches of pine straw, or 3 to 4 inches of shredded wood. After planting, stake and tie large plants to prevent top movement and damage to the root system.

## Fertilization

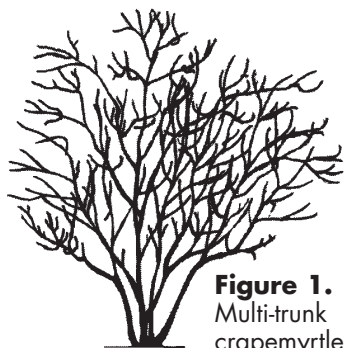
Have soil tested and follow recommendations provided when fertilizing. If you have not had your soil tested, apply 2 to 4 pounds of nursery special fertilizer with a 2-1-1 ratio per 100 square feet of bed area. Fertilize individual plants with one-fourth to one-half cup of fertilizer in a circle no closer than one foot to the base of the plant. Sprinkle fertilizer uniformly over the area out from the base of the plant, and water the area thoroughly. Fertilize in early spring and again in early summer before the plants begin to flower. Over-fertilization can result in little or no flowering, excessive vegetative growth, and possible winter damage, resulting from late-season growth and failure to harden off.

## Pruning

Crapemyrtles bloom on the current year's wood, and pruning stimulates new growth, which increases the number of bloom clusters. Prune crapemyrtles in late winter or early spring before growth begins. Whether the plant will be used as a shrub or a small tree determines the method of pruning.

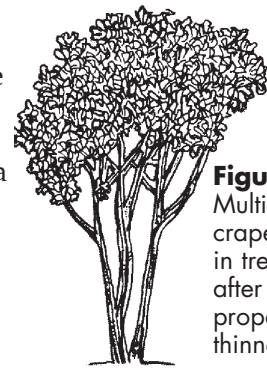
## Thinning

Thinning, the removal of old and weak branches at their points of origin, is used to open up crapemyrtles pruned to tree form. Thinning does not stimulate prolific growth and leaves the pruned plant with a more natural appearance.



**Figure 1.** Multi-trunk crapemyrtle before being thinned.

Select one main stem for a single-trunk tree or three to five stems for a multi-trunk tree. Remove all other stems at ground level. Allow the main trunk or trunks to reach a height of 5 or 6 feet before branching. When the main stems have reached the desired height, tip prune to encourage branching. Remove all growth that develops below the desired branch height.



**Figure 2.** Multi-trunk crapemyrtle in tree form after being properly thinned.

## Cutting Back

Trying to cut back plants to control the size could be a never-ending battle for landscapers. It destroys the natural, balanced form of plants. If the size of the plant is too big for the landscape, the easiest thing might be to cut it back to the ground and apply herbicide to the cut surface of the trunk.

There are many crapemyrtle cultivars with various flower colors and mature sizes. Selecting the right plant and starting over would be less trouble than battling a plant that is too large.

## General Pruning Tips

You can prune fading bloom clusters, especially on early flowering cultivars, to encourage the development of additional bloom clusters and to extend the bloom season.

Occasionally, heavy bloom clusters and branches have to be removed during the growing season to prevent limb breakage. Limit this type of pruning to what is necessary to protect the health of the plant.

Do not prune crapemyrtles in the fall following leaf drop. It may stimulate new growth and make the plants susceptible to winter injury. Also, heavy pruning destroys the natural appearance and form of the plants, which will be obvious during the winter months until growth resumes in the spring.

## Cultivar Selection

Cultivars of crapemyrtle are suited to most situations in today's landscapes. Dwarf cultivars are adapted to growing in containers; some are low growing semi-dwarf cultivars, and others grow more than 20 feet tall. Some cultivars are upright and narrow in form; others have a more spreading form. Bark characteristics, flower color, fall color, plant size and shape, and disease resistance have been greatly improved in recent years as the result of private, state, and federally funded breeding programs. See the table on page 5 for cultivars for Mississippi landscapes.

*continued on back page*

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**Recommended Crapemyrtle Cultivars for Mississippi**

Variety	Flower color	Approx. ultimate height	Habit of growth	How hardy	L Indica or X Fauriei	Tree form	Best exfoliate bark	Mildew resistance	Fall color	Approx. date of first flower	Approx. number of days of flowering
Centennial	Bright purple	3'	Compact Dwarf	Good	Indica			Good	Orange	Mid- June	70
Victor	Dark red	3'	Dwarf compact	Very Good	Indica			Good	Yellow	Late June	85
Hope	White	4'	Open dwarf	Good	Indica			Good	Yellow	Mid- June	65
Hopi	Medium pink	7'	Low spreading	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Orange red	Late June	100
Pecos	Medium pink	7'	Low spreading	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Maroon	Early July	100
Zuni	Medium lavender	10'	Low upright	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Red orange	Early July	90
Apalachee	Light lavender	12'	Upright globose	Very	Fauriei		Best	High	Russett	Mid- July	90
Comanche	Coral pink	12'	Upright globose	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Red orange	Early July	80
Osage	Clear pink	12'	Pendulous globose	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Red	July	100
Acoma	White	14'	Low spreading	Very	Fauriei			High	Purple red	Late June	90
Lipan	Medium lavender	15'	Upright globose	Very	Fauriei		Best	High	Orange	Mid- July	80
Seminole	Medium pink	15'	Compact globose	Good	Indica			Good	Yellow	Mid- July	75
Sioux	Light purple	15'	Dense upright	Very	Fauriei		Yes	High	Maroon	Late July	110
Tuskegee	Coral to dark pink	15'	Broad spreading	Very	Fauriei	Yes	Yes	High	Red orange	Late June	100
Wm Toovy	Pink Red	15'	Vase shaped	Good	Indica			Good	Red orange	Mid July	90
Yuca	Medium lavender	15'	Upright globose	Very	Fauriei	Yes	Yes	High	Yellow	Early July	90
Regal Red	Dark red	16'	Broadly upright	Good	Indica			Good	Red orange	Mid- July	70
Tuscarora	Coral to dark pink	16'	Broadvase	Good	Fauriei		Yes	High	Red orange	Early July	70
Conestoga	Pale lavender	18'	Open arching	Good	Indica			Good	Yellow	Early July	70
Near East	Light pink	18'	Open spreading	Least	Indica			Moderate	Yellow orange	Mid- July	90
Pink	Pink	18'	Upright	Less	Indica	Yes		Moderate	Yellow orange	Mid- July	65
Byers Wonderful	White	20'	Very upright	Very	Indica	Yes		Good	Yellow	Late June	90
Carolina Beauty	Dark red	20'	Very upright	Fair	Indica	Yes		Poor	Orange	Mid- July	65
Catawba	Violet purple	20'	Upright	Good	Indica	Yes		Good	Red orange	Mid- July	70
Hardy lavender	Medium lavender	20'	Upright	Good	Indica	Yes		Good	Red	Late July	75
Miami	Dark pink	20'	Upright	Very	Fauriei	Small	Yes	High	Orange	Mid- June	110
Potomac	Clear pink	20'	Upright	Good	Indica	Yes		High	Orange	Late June	90
Powhatan	Medium pink	20'	Upright	Good	Indica	Yes		Good	Yellow orange	Late July	75
Purple	Medium pink	20'	Upright	Less	Indica	Yes		Moderate	Orange	Mid- July	65
Wichita	Lavender	20'	Vase shaped	Very	Fauriei	Small	Yes	High	Mahogany	Early July	100
Biloxi	Pale pink	25'	Vase shaped	Very	Fauriei	Small	Yes	High	Orange red	July	80
Byers Standard	Soft red	25'	Upright	Good	Indica	Yes		Good	Orange	Mid- July	75
Muskogee	Light lavender	24'	Broad tall tree	Very	Fauriei	Yes	Yes	High	Red oprange	Mid- June	120
Natchez	White	30'	Broad tall tree	Very	Fauriei	Yes	Best	High	Red orange	Mid- June	110

## Diseases

**Powdery Mildew.** The major disease affecting crapemyrtles is powdery mildew. This fungal disease reduces flower performance and weakens plants by attacking flower buds, growing shoot tips, and young leaves. Powdery mildew is most common when cool nights are followed by warm days. It occurs most often in crowded, low areas with poor air circulation. The fungus over-winters in diseased plant debris on the ground and on the dormant shoot buds.

Powdery mildew infection appears as a grayish-white powdery fungal growth. As leaves expand, they become curled and distorted. On older leaves, large white patches of the fungus appear without much leaf distortion. Flower buds covered with the fungus either fail to open or open improperly. The infection may spread to mature flowers and cause a flower blight.

Crapemyrtle cultivars released in recent years with *Lagerstroemia fauriei* in their parentage are resistant to powdery mildew. These cultivars are noted in the table. Cultivar selection is an effective way to control the disease.

Cultural methods for controlling powdery mildew involve sanitation procedures and applying fungicides. In the fall, remove and destroy all diseased twigs. Good air circulation reduces the possibility of disease development. Proper pruning will improve air circulation. Do not crowd the plants, and do not plant in low, damp areas.

Begin applying recommended fungicides in the spring when growth begins and immediately after the first sign of disease infection. Apply fungicide during the flowering period to prevent blossom blight. More about powdery mildew and fungicide to control it can be found in MSU Extension Services Information Sheet 1666, *The Plant Doctor – Powdery Mildew on Crape Myrtle*.

It is best to alternate applications of a systemic fungicide with one of the protectant fungicides to prevent the development of fungicide-resistant strains of the fungus. Use sulfur only at temperatures below 85 degrees Fahrenheit to avoid leaf burn. Always follow the product label instructions.

**Sooty Mold.** Sooty mold is a black, powdery coating that develops on leaves and twigs during cool, moist, cloudy weather. Several causal fungi grow in the sugary honeydew deposited on the plants by small sucking insects, such as aphids and white flies. Control the feeding insects that produce the honeydew, and you control sooty mold.

The fungi that cause sooty mold do not attack the plants but derive nutrients from the honeydew deposited by the insects. Although sooty mold does not directly attack crapemyrtles, its presence destroys their beauty and can weaken the plants by shading the leaves from sunlight. Heavy infestations of insects that secrete honeydew weaken crapemyrtle plants. Several insecticides are approved for use on crapemyrtles to control sucking insects.



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Revised by **Mengmeng Gu, Ph.D.**, Assistant Extension Professor, Plant and Soil Sciences. Prepared by **David Tatum, Ph.D.**, Extension Horticulturist; **Alan Henn, Ph.D.**, Extension Plant Pathologist; **James Jarratt, Ph.D.**, Extension Entomologist; and M.V. Patel, retired Extension Plant Pathologist.

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