

# *Lagerstroemia* x 'Tonto' Tonto Crape Myrtle<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

A long period of striking summer flower color, attractive fall foliage, and good drought-tolerance all combine to make crape myrtle a favorite small tree for either formal or informal landscapes (Fig. 1). It is highly recommended for planting in urban and suburban areas.

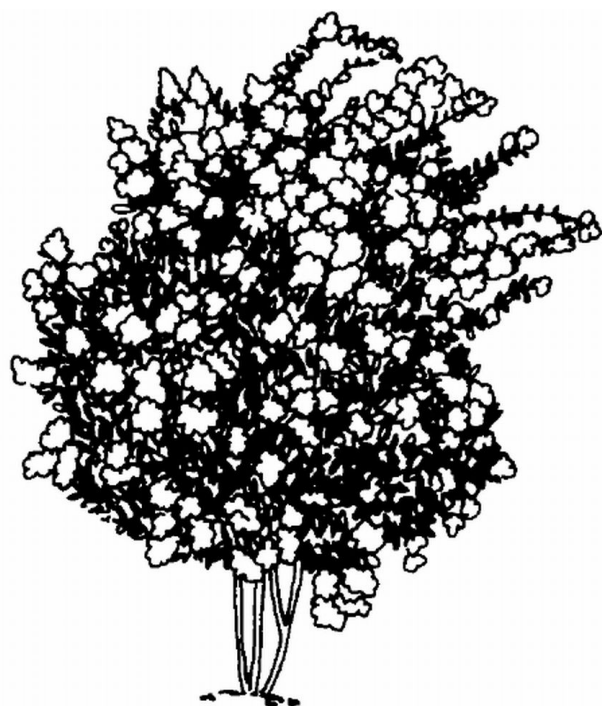


Figure 1. 'Tonto' crape myrtle

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Lagerstroemia* x 'Tonto'

**Pronunciation:** lay-gur-STREE-mee-uh

**Common name(s):** 'Tonto' crape myrtle

**Family:** *Lythraceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** border; container or above-ground planter; trained as a standard; accent

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

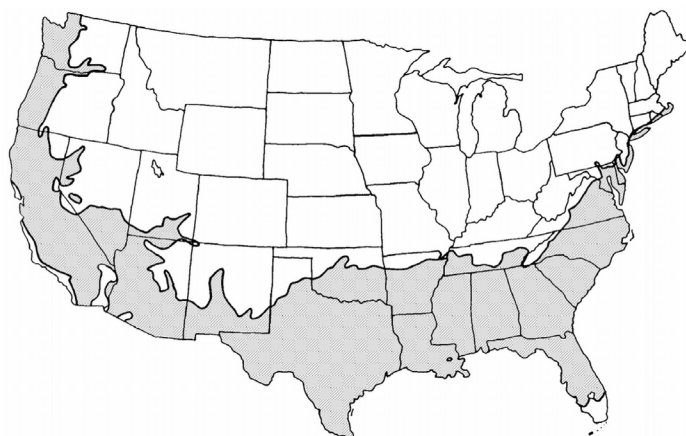


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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## Description

**Height:** 5 to 10 feet  
**Spread:** 5 to 8 feet  
**Plant habit:** round  
**Plant density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** oblong; obovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous  
**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** yellow; red  
**Fall characteristic:** showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** red  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; summer flowering



Figure 3. Flower of 'Tonto' crape myrtle

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch  
**Fruit cover:** dry or hard  
**Fruit color:** brown  
**Fruit characteristic:** persists on the plant

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; showy; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk  
**Current year stem/twig color:** reddish  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Available in all shades of white, pink, red, or lavender, the 6- to 12-inch-long clustered blooms appear on the tips of branches during late spring and summer in USDA hardiness zones 9 and 10 as well as summer in other areas. The individual flowers are ruffled and crinkly as if made of crepe paper. The smooth, peeling bark and multi-branched, open habit of crape myrtle make it ideal for specimen planting where its bright red to orange-colored fall leaves add further interest. Most forms of the tree are upright, upright-spreading, or vase-shaped, spreading out as they ascend. Most tree types grow to 20 to 25 feet tall although there are more dwarf types available. The upright, vase-shaped crown makes the tall-growing selections well-suited for street tree planting.

Pruning should be done in late winter or early in the spring before growth begins because it is easier to see which branches to prune. New growth can be pinched during the growing season to increase branchiness and flower number. Pruning methods vary from topping, to cutting crape myrtle nearly to the ground each spring, to the removal of dead wood and old flower stalks only. Topping creates several long, thin branches from each cut which droop down under the weight of the flowers. This practice disfigures the nice trunk and branch structure. Lower branches are often thinned to show off the trunk form and color. You can remove the spent flower heads to encourage a second flush of flowers and to prevent formation of the brown fruits. Since cultivars are now available in a wide range of growth heights, severe pruning should not be necessary to control size. Severe pruning or topping can stimulate basal sprouting, which can become a constant nuisance,

requiring regular removal. Some trees sprout from the base of the trunk and roots even without severe heading. This can be a maintenance nuisance.

Crape myrtle grows best in full sun with rich, moist soil but will tolerate less hospitable positions in the landscape just as well, once it becomes established. It grows well in limited soil spaces in urban areas such as along boulevards, in parking lots, and in small pavement cutouts if provided with some irrigation until well established. They tolerate clay and alkaline soil well. However, the flowers of some selections may stain car paint. Insect pests are few but crape myrtle is susceptible to powdery mildew damage, especially when planted in some shade or when the leaves are kept moist. There are new cultivars (many developed by the USDA) available that are resistant to powdery mildew and aphids.

Many cultivars of crape myrtle are available: hybrid 'Acoma', 14 to 16 feet tall, white flowers, purple-red fall foliage, mildew resistant; hybrid 'Biloxi', 25 feet tall, pale pink blooms, orange-red fall foliage, hardy and mildew resistant; 'Cherokee', 10 to 12 feet, bright red flowers; 'Powhatan', 14 to 20 feet, clear yellow fall foliage, medium purple flowers. The hybrid cultivars 'Natchez', 30 feet tall, pure white flowers, resistant to aphids, one of the best Crape-Myrtles; 'Muskogee', 24 feet tall, light lavender flowers, and 'Tuscarora', 16 feet tall, dark coral pink blooms, are hybrids between *Lagerstroemia indica* and *Lagerstroemia fauriei* and have greater resistance to mildew. The cultivar 'Crape Myrtlette' has the same color range as the species but only grow to three to four feet high. The National Arboretum releases are generally superior because they have been selected for their disease resistance. These releases may prove more resistant to powdery mildew in the Deep South, although further testing needs to be done to confirm this.

Propagation is by cuttings or seed.

## Pests and Diseases

Aphids often infest the new growth causing an unsightly but harmless sooty mold to grow on the foliage. Heavy aphid infestations cause a heavy black sooty mold, which detracts from the tree's appearance.

Powdery mildew can severely affect crape myrtle. Select resistant cultivars and hybrids to avoid this disease. Leaf spots are only a minor concern and do not require treatment.