

Lagerstroemia indica: Crapemyrtle¹

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Introduction

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

General Information

Scientific name: *Lagerstroemia indica*

Pronunciation: lay-ger-STREE-mee-uh IN-dih-kuh

Common name(s): crapemyrtle

Family: *Lythraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7A through 9A (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Asia and Northern Australia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended

Uses: street without sidewalk; specimen; deck or patio; container or planter; trained as a standard; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; highway median; shade



Figure 1. Full Form - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crapemyrtle
Credits: UF/IFAS

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 10 to 30 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: vase
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), obovate, oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 1 to 3 inches
Leaf color: dark green on top, pale green underneath
Fall color: yellow, orange, red
Fall characteristic: showy



Figure 3. Leaf - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crape myrtle
 Credits: UF/IFAS

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray, pink, purple, lavender, red
Flower characteristics: very showy; emerges in clusters on panicles
Flowering: late spring to summer

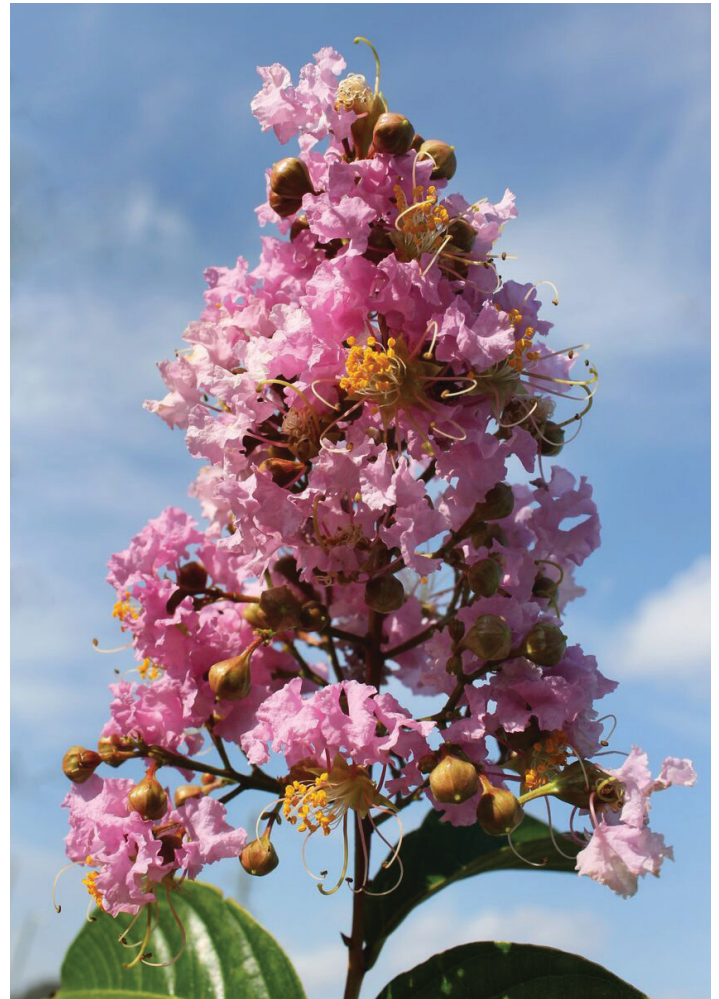


Figure 4. Flower - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crape myrtle
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Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, round
Fruit length: ¼ to ½ inch
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem
Fruiting: persists through winter



Figure 5. Fruit - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crape myrtle
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Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: Smooth, tan orange, and flakes off in patches to reveal shades of brown, green, and reddish brown

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown, green

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate



Figure 6. Bark Variation 1 - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crape myrtle
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 7. Bark Variation 2 - *Lagerstroemia indica*: crape myrtle
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Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

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, and summer in other areas. The individual flowers are ruffled and crinkly as to appear 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 which 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-Myrtlettes' have 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

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.

Diseases

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.

Reference

Koeser, A. K., Hasing, G., Friedman, M. H., and Irving, R. B. 2015. Trees: North & Central Florida. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.