

Lagerstroemia speciosa: Queens Crape Myrtle¹

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Introduction

This is one of only a few deciduous trees which grow in tropical and subtropical areas of the country. A profusion of large, three-inch wide, bright pink to lavender blooms appear in dense, foot-long, terminal panicles from June to July, making queen's crape myrtle a spectacular specimen or street tree. This large, upright rounded, deciduous tree is clothed with 4 to 14-inch-long, dark green, oblong, leathery leaves which turn attractively red before falling in winter. Queen's crape myrtle can reach 30 to 60 feet in height and a spread of 30 to 40 feet. The attractive bark is smooth, mottled and peeling. In India, the wood is used for railroad ties and construction. The bark is thin and easily injured.

General Information

Scientific name: *Lagerstroemia speciosa*

Pronunciation: lay-ger-STREE-mee-uh spee-see-OH-suh

Common name(s): queen's crape myrtle

Family: *Lythraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to tropical Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

Uses: urban tolerant; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; street without sidewalk; specimen; shade; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft;



Figure 1. Full Form - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
Credits: UF/IFAS

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parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 60 feet

Spread: 30 to 40 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round, vase, upright/erect

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire



Figure 3. Leaf - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
Credits: UF/IFAS

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), obovate, oblong

Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome

Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 14 inches

Leaf color: dark green on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: red

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: bright pink or lavender

Flower characteristics: very showy; ruffled-looking and emerges in clusters on 1-2' long, terminal panicles

Flowering: late spring to summer



Figure 4. Flower - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
Credits: UF/IFAS

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard; woody, berry-like capsule

Fruit color: green to brown with maturity

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy;
fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Fruiting: fall



Figure 5. Fruit - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
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Figure 6. Fruit Open - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
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Trunk and Branches

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

Bark: light brown to gray, thin, smooth, mottled, and flaking or peeling in strips

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown, green

Current year twig thickness: thin, medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 7. Bark - *Lagerstroemia speciosa*: queen's crape myrtle
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: none

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

Queen's crape myrtle will grow in full sun on a wide range of well-drained soils but is not salt-tolerant. Where there are no overhead restrictions, this makes a nice large street tree due to the upright-spreading habit of growth. This reduces the regular pruning needed to remove lower drooping branches on some other trees. However, when the trees are young, some lower branches will need to be removed for street tree planting to create clearance for passage of pedestrians and vehicles. The tree should tolerate storms well having hard wood with flexible branches, as long as they are well spaced along the trunk and not clumped together growing from one point on the trunk. Plants should be watered faithfully and protected from frost. Not a tree to plant and forget, queen's crape myrtle appreciates regular fertilization or leaves become chlorotic. It will tolerate alkaline soil.

Propagation is by cuttings, division of root suckers, or by seed which germinate readily. Plants will flower the second year from seed. There are other species of tropical *Lagerstroemia*, some available in selected nurseries.

Pests

Aphids and scale, followed by sooty mold.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.