

C r a p e m y r t l e

Delicate paper-thin petals; beautiful large blooms in white, pink, red, or purple; lustrous green leaves forming a thick canopy of foliage; smooth, exfoliating bark; one of the favorite plants in a southern garden—this is the crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica* and *Lagerstroemia faurei* crosses).

From the showy flowers to the superb bark and foliage, the crapemyrtle is a favorite landscape plant throughout the South. Introduced in 1747, the crapemyrtle is native to China and Korea. It is hardy from Zones 7 to 9 and can be found in the South, Southwest, and West Coast. Crapemyrtles are found as far north as Baltimore, Maryland, but they are better suited for warmer regions of the country.

The crapemyrtle is an adaptable plant. It grows best in moist, well-drained soils, prefers full sun, and is drought resistant. Flowers develop on the current season's growth. Bloom time varies with the crapemyrtle selection. Additional flowering can be stimulated by fertilization and the removal of faded blooms.

Crapemyrtles are valuable landscape plants that can be used as shrubs or small trees ranging



Acoma is a dwarf crapemyrtle cultivar with white flowers.

in size from 18 inches to over 25 feet. An asset to almost any landscape, the crapemyrtle can be a very beautiful specimen shrub or tree, often used in groups underplanted with a ground cover. The dark green ground cover contrasts the gray to tan shades of the handsome bark. The smaller varieties of crapemyrtle can be used as hedges, screens, or in masses. Planted in this manner, crapemyrtles offer a grand display of color throughout the summer months.

Crapemyrtles are commonly multi-trunked; however, single-trunk specimens are available with larger selections. A canopy of foliage covers the top half of the plant, with the bottom half of the plant remaining leafless, revealing the beautiful bark. The leaves of the crapemyrtle are a glossy medium green, turning yellow, red orange, or red in the fall. The

smooth bark exfoliates, flaking off in irregular patches to reveal various shades of brown to gray.

One of the prominent features of the crapemyrtle is the spectacular flowers, formed in large panicles ranging from 6 to 8 inches in length and 3 to 5 inches in width. The petals have a crinkled appearance, similar to crepe paper, hence the name crapemyrtle. Blooming from mid-June through September, the crapemyrtle ranges in flower color from white to various shades of pink, purple, and red.

Propagating Crapemyrtle

The crapemyrtle can be easily propagated by seeds or cuttings. If by seed, germination occurs within 2 to 3 weeks. If by cutting, softwood cuttings



Crapemyrtles offer excellent flowering characteristics in the summer.

should be taken between late May and July. Rooting should occur within 3 to 4 weeks.

The most commonly used methods of propagation are hardwood and softwood cuttings. To propagate by hardwood cuttings, take 8-inch-long and 1/2-inch-diameter cuttings in early to mid-November. Stick several cuttings in a container filled with a potting soil or well-drained garden soil. About an inch of the cutting should protrude above the soil line. These cuttings can be left outside but should be protected from severe freeze. Once new growth emerges, place the container in a sunny location, and keep it watered until you can plant the cutting in the summer or fall.

Softwood cuttings consist of 4- to 6-inch cuttings taken from actively growing shoots at any time during the growing season. The cut ends can be dipped in a rooting hormone and then stuck in a well-drained potting mix. Keep the cuttings misted to keep them from drying out before roots can form. Rooted cuttings can then be planted in larger pots and grown to a larger size

to improve survivability when placed in the landscape.

Care of Crapemyrtle in the Landscape

Grow crapemyrtle in full sun for satisfactory flowering and to reduce disease problems. While it will tolerate a wide range of soil conditions once established, crapemyrtle does not thrive in a very wet location.

Container-grown plants can be planted at any time of the year. However, they must be watered conscientiously, particularly if they are planted in the summer. Balled and burlapped and bare-root plants are generally better able to become established if they are planted during the dormant season. Although the canopy of a crapemyrtle may have lost its leaves in the fall, the roots typically remain active later into the fall and early winter. Crapemyrtles transplant easily, so they can be moved in the landscape. Move them during the fall or late winter.

Crapemyrtles do not require much fertilizer. They are also adaptable to a fairly wide soil pH range, from 5.0 to 6.5. A soil test

provides the best standard for determining the amount of fertilizer that is needed and whether the pH is at the appropriate level for your plants. However, 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of bed area is usually adequate to support new growth in an established tree. Be aware that overfertilization can reduce cold hardiness.

Crapemyrtle Pests

A few pests can be a problem for the crapemyrtle. Diseases such as powdery mildew, black spot, sooty mold, tip blight, leaf spot, and root rot can affect the crapemyrtle. Two insects, aphids and Florida wax scale, can also be a problem. However, with proper management, such as planting in a sunny location with good air circulation, these pests can be controlled and even prevented.

For more information about controlling these pests, refer to the following Alabama Cooperative Extension System circulars:

- ANR-1047, "Common Foliage Diseases Of Crapemyrtle"
- ANR-189, "Controlling Aphids On Ornamentals"
- ANR-274, "Controlling Scale Insects"

Pruning

Heading back crapemyrtles in late winter promotes lush new growth in the spring. Flowers are produced on the current season's growth, so flowers develop even after severe pruning. However, such pruning destroys the natural character of the plant, with the winter form being an unsightly stemmy-mess. It also promotes sucker growth, which detracts from the beauty of the trunk.

Preferred pruning practices involve limited pruning. Some thinning of branches to enhance

plant form is desirable, but heavy pruning is not needed.

A wide assortment of crape-myrtle cultivars offer a variety of sizes that can be tailored to the site. Some selections are shrub-like in form, growing to a size of only 3 to 5 feet, while others become sizeable small trees in the 25- to 35-foot range. There is a crape-myrtle for just about every situation. In the long run, crape-myrtles will flower well if they are in a sunny location and left alone.

Removing the spent flower clusters from some of the earlier flowering cultivars can induce them to produce additional blooms later in the summer. However, there is some concern that this can reduce cold hardiness of the plant.

Crapemyrtle Cultivars

Many crapemyrtle cultivars exist, varying in sizes and colors. The following tables describe a number of them.

Check with your local nursery for cultivars that exist in your area, or contact your county Extension agent.

Whether one crapemyrtle or a mass is planted, the crapemyrtle is a beautiful addition to the landscape. The crapemyrtle will always be a favorite landscape plant in the South because of its flowers, handsome bark, and beautiful fall color.

References

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Whitcomb, Carl E. *Know It and Grow It II*, Lacebark Publications, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1983.

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Muscogee is a large-growing crapemyrtle selection with lavender flowers.

Table 1. Common Crapemyrtle Cultivars — Dwarf Form (3 to 5 feet)

Cultivar	Habit	Flower Color	Bloom Date	Days of Flowering	Fall Color	Bark Type	Mildew Resistance	Comments
Centennial	Compact Globose	Bright Purple	Mid-June	70	Orange	Smooth	Good	Superb in masses; beautiful, bright color
Ozark Spring	Compact Dwarf	Lavender	Late June	70	Yellow	Smooth	Good	Flower changes from lavender to white.
Victor	Compact Dwarf	Dark Red	Late June	85	Yellow	Smooth	Good	Similar to azalea; blooms entire summer; good dwarf selection

Table 2. Common Crapemyrtle Cultivars — Semidwarf Form (5 to 10 feet)

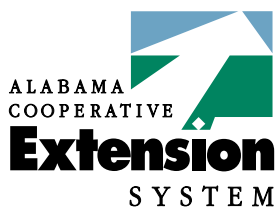
Cultivar	Habit	Flower Color	Bloom Date	Days of Flowering	Fall Color	Bark Type	Mildew Resistance	Comments
Acoma	Low spreading Semipendulous	White	Late June	90	Purple Red	Exfoliating	High	Recurrent flowering
Caddo	Low spreading	Bright Pink	Mid-July	80	Orange Red	Exfoliating	High	
Hopi	Low spreading	Medium Pink	Late June	100	Orange Red	Exfoliating	High	Extremely cold hardy; recurrent flowering
Pecos	Low globose	Medium Pink	Early July	100	Maroon	Exfoliating	High	Recurrent flowering; bark is dark brown.
Prairie Lace	Compact upright	Pink (white edges)	Mid-June	90	Red	Smooth	Fair	Flowers are variegated; sterile
Tonto	Globose multistem	Red	Mid-July	75	Bright Maroon	Exfoliating	High	Outstanding red hybrid
Zuni	Globose	Medium Lavender	Early July	100	Red Orange	Exfoliating	High	Recurrent flowering; good fall color

Table 3. Common Crapemyrtle Cultivars — Small Tree (10 to 20 feet)

Cultivar	Habit	Flower Color	Bloom Date	Days of Flowering	Fall Color	Bark Type	Mildew Resistance	Comments
Apalachee	Upright Vase	Light Lavender	Mid-July	90	Russet	Exfoliating	High	Very hardy; spectacular bark (cinnamon to chestnut brown in color)
Catawba	Globose Medium	Violet Purple	Mid-July	70	Red Orange	Smooth	Good	Deep flower color
Centennial Spirit	Upright	Dark Red	Late June	110	Red Orange	Smooth	Fair	Flowers are torchlike
Comanche	Upright; Broad Spreading Crown	Coral Pink	Early July	80	Red	Exfoliating	High	Flowers are plentiful; bark is a light sandalwood color
Conestoga	Open Arching	Medium Lavender	Early July	70	Yellow	Smooth	Fair	Flowers change from medium lavender to pale lavender.
Lipan	Broad Upright	Medium Lavender	Mid-July	80	Orange	Exfoliating	High	Spectacular bark; almost white in color
Near East	Open Spreading	Light Pink	Mid-July	90	Yellow Orange	Smooth	Moderate	Least hardy; outstanding pink flower
Osage	Open Spreading; Semipendulous	Clear Light Pink	July	100	Red	Exfoliating	High	Graceful habit; recurrent flowering
Powhatan	Compact Upright	Medium Purple	Late July	75	Yellow Orange	Smooth	Good	Good flower color; lovely tree
Regal Red	Broad Upright	Dark Red	Mid-July	70	Red Orange	Smooth	Good	Abundant flowers
Seminole	Compact Globose	Clear Medium Pink	Mid-June	75	Yellow	Exfoliating	Good	Recurrent flowering
Sioux	Dense Upright	Dark Pink	Late July	90	Maroon	Exfoliating	High	Deep pink flowers catch the eye.
Tuskegee	Broad Spreading	Dark Pink	Late June	100	Red Orange	Exfoliating	High	Recurrent flowering; spectacular bark
William Toovey	Vase-Shaped	Pink Red	Mid-July	90	Red Orange	Smooth	Good	Sometimes called Watermelon Red; first named crapemyrtle
Yuma	Dense Upright	Medium Lavender	Late July	90	Yellow Orange	Exfoliating	High	Very hardy; clustered flowers

Table 4. Common Crapemyrtle Cultivars — Large Tree (20 feet and larger)

Cultivar	Habit	Flower Color	Bloom Date	Days of Flowering	Fall Color	Bark Type	Mildew Resistance	Comments
Biloxi	Upright Vase	Pale Pink	Early July	80	Orange Red	Exfoliating	High	Very hardy; recurrent flowering; excellent bark
Byers Standard Red	Upright Vase	Soft Red	Mid-July	75	Orange	Smooth	Good	An old favorite
Bryers Wonderful White	Very Upright	Clear White	Late June	90	Yellow	Smooth	Good	Most hardy; large flowers
Carolina Beauty	Very Upright	Dark Red	Mid-July	65	Orange	Smooth	Poor	East Coast favorite
Choctaw	Upright	Bright Pink	Mid-July	90	Maroon	Exfoliating	Very	Excellent tree cultivar
Hardy Lavender	Upright	Medium Lavender	Late July	75	Red	Smooth	Good	Very hardy; flowers until frost
Miami	Upright	Dark Pink	Early July	100	Orange	Exfoliating	High	Spectacular bark; lovely flowers
Muskogee	Broad Tall Tree	Light Lavender	Mid-June	120	Red Orange	Exfoliating	High	Good for street planting
Natchez	Broad Tall Tree	White	Mid-June	110	Red Orange	Exfoliating	High	Very hardy; tallest tree; excellent bark (dark cinnamon brown)
Potomac	Upright	Clear Medium Pink	Late-June	90	Orange	Smooth	Fair	Beautiful flowers; sometimes frost damaged
Tuscarora	Broad Vase	Dark Coral Pink	Early July	70	Red Orange	Exfoliating	High	Broad crown; recurrent flowering; excellent bark; sometimes frost damaged
Wichita	Upright Vase	Lavender	Early July	110	Copper	Exfoliating	High	Recurrent flowering; excellent bark; difficult to root



ANR-1083

David Williams, *Extension Horticulturist*, Associate Professor, **Ken Tilt**, *Extension Horticulturist*, Professor, and **Shannon Valenti-Windsor**, former student, all in Horticulture at Auburn University

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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