

Reblooming Crape Myrtle

When summer approaches, crape myrtles turn from green to beautiful shades of pink, lavender, red and white. Unfortunately the flowers eventually fade. You can sometimes extend the fashion show with some special care. These tips should prepare your crape myrtle to look its best during the summer.

As crape myrtle flowers fade, they turn to small hard green seed pods. Carefully cut these off, fertilize and water the trees. The crape myrtles may bloom again. Be cautious not to cut off the new flower buds. They are probably forming just behind the old flowers. For fertilization, use two cups of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet of bed space. Spread it evenly around the plant. Water with one three-quarter to one inch of water once a week. Do not fertilize if the soil is dry.

Groom your crape myrtles to enhance their appearance. Remove unwanted growth at the base of the plant. These "water sprouts" or shoots make the plant look unkempt, and are best removed as soon as possible. Remove weeds also and renew the mulch around the trees.

Look out for pests. Aphids (also called plant lice) are 1/8 inch long and pear-shaped. They suck plant juice and give off a clear residue which sticks to plant leaves. A black sooty mold grows on this residue. The mold can be scraped off with your fingernail. Control aphids with regular sprays of insecticidal soap, Malathion, Orthene, or other labeled chemicals. Read and follow all label directions.

Crape myrtles prefer six to eight hours of sun a day, deep watering once a week during droughts, large wide planting holes, mulch, and pruning once every two or three years.

Some newer crape myrtle varieties are much more sporty than others. They can even "strut their stuff" all four seasons of the year. Select these varieties when planting. These varieties have beautiful, exfoliating bark in the winter, followed by brilliant green foliage in spring. In summer, the boughs put on their boldest colors. They are trimmed in watermelon red, lavender, clear white, and coral pink. The ground around may be littered with their small, crepe-textured flowers. Some are even resistant to powdery mildew. Call our office for a listing of some of these. Plan to plant them in late fall. These special varieties culminate their season with the gold and crimson of the fall foliage. This is almost like a temporary farewell and a garden promise for the next season.

Crape myrtles are excellent plants for the middle Georgia area. Once established they are drought and heat tolerant. If you buy some of the newer varieties, they have few pests. They come in many different heights and have varying degrees of fall color. However, to get the best from these garden debutantes, plant the best varieties and care for them properly.