

Crape Myrtle, Reliable Summer Color

By Larry Figart, Extension Agent with University of Florida / Duval County Extension Service



In summer, we walk outside, we are immediately hit with a thick wall of northeast Florida humidity. While most of our landscape trees and plants are drooping or having pest and disease problems, the crape myrtle is standing out showing off its blooms all summer long. Now is a great time to look in nurseries for crape myrtles because they're in bloom. However, don't choose your crape myrtle by flower color alone. It is important to shop at nurseries that have cultivar names on the label so you can better match the plant to your landscape needs.

Before you pick out a crape myrtle tree, there are some important decisions to make. First what size of tree will fit in your landscape. The number one mistake is choosing a tree where the mature size is too large, and therefore needing annual pruning. By selecting a tree based on mature height, you can avoid the "crape murder" pruning decision. Crape myrtle cultivars have differing sizes of mature height that include; dwarf (less than 4'), semi- dwarf (less than 12'), intermediate (less than 20'), and tree (greater than 20'). Once you have decided what height of tree will fit in your landscape, do the research to find the variety that matches the size you need. The best thing is most of these cultivated varieties have all the standard flower colors.

According to Dr. Gary Knox, an Extension Specialist and Professor of Environmental Horticulture with the University of Florida, *"some of the best tree-size types are Natchez (white), Red Rocket® (red), Sioux (pink) and Apalachee (lavender). Superior semi dwarf crape myrtles (12 ft.) are Acoma (white), Cheyenne (true red), Tonto (fuchsia red), Hopi (pink) and Catawba (purple). Although smaller shrub (6 ft.) crape myrtles are hard to find, Cherry*

Pruning Crape Myrtle (pg. 2)

Dazzle® is a nice mounding red and *Pixie White* and *New Orleans* (purple) are good selections". For more information on crape myrtles recommended for north Florida go to: <http://jefferson.ifas.ufl.edu/newsletters/2015/06/23/crapemyrtle-cultivars-for-north-florida/>. Additionally, a convenient table of many of the common crape myrtle varieties and heights can be found in at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/MG/MG26600.pdf>

Crape myrtle historically has had very few pests. Powdery mildew is a problem on some of the older cultivars, however most of the new cultivars are resistant. However, recently, the crape myrtle bark scale has been reported in a residential landscape in northwest Florida. It was only a matter of time before this pest, native to Asia and discovered in Texas in 2014, would make its way to Florida. Since it is the only bark scale known to feed on crape myrtle in the United States, it should be easy to identify. Heavy infestations are easily seen due to abundant black sooty mold and patches of the white or gray scales on the trunk, branches, and twigs of crape myrtle. If you notice these on your crape myrtles, please report them to your county extension agent and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industry. For more information on crape myrtle bark scale go to <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1218>.



<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval/> email duval@ifas.ufl.edu phone (904) 255-7450