

Pruning Tips for Crape Myrtles *by Candy Roach / Bexar County Master Gardener*



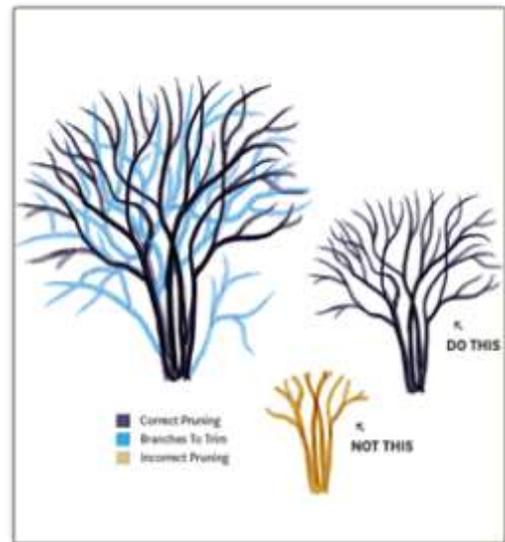
*Image from
livinginwilliamsburgvirginia.blogspot.com*

Crape Myrtles are one of the most beautiful and graceful trees that have a long bloom period in our area. They are a sight to behold when cared for properly. Each springtime, many of you will begin to tend to your gardening tasks as we anticipate the changing of the seasons. Here are a few tips to help guide you as you contemplate what to do with your Crape Myrtle. Believe me, it's a lot easier than you think.

First of all, be advised that Crape Myrtles require very little pruning to maintain their natural form and beauty. You should focus your pruning to remove dead branches, thin the trunks (preferably when young) to shape your tree, removing branches that are rubbing against each other, and removing suckers as they sprout at the base. This is all that is required to maintain the shape of your tree.

You should never top your Crape Myrtles. Topping these trees will force them to sucker more at the base, which creates more work for you and also creates ugly growth on the trees. Other injuries such as damage to the trunk by hitting them with lawn mowers or string trimmers may also cause suckers.

Topping also severely weakens the branches, as the tree will try to recover by producing a large number of spindly branches that struggle to support the heavy blooms. The resulting nooks and crannies provide a perfect habitat for insects such as crape myrtle bark scale.



*Photo from tallahasseeemagazine.com / How to
prune Crape Myrtles by Audrey Post*



*Goldfinches – photo credit
gardeningwithnature.blogspot.com*

We have a wide variety of birds that love eating the Crape Myrtle seeds, such as goldfinches, housefinches and cardinals to name a few. Leaving the spent seed pods on the tree will provide food for these birds that migrate through our neighborhood during the spring. You may be fortunate enough to have a pair of these feathered friends actually take up residence in your gardens.

We are all seeking ways to reduce our lawn maintenance so we have more time to enjoy its beauty, so save your shoulders and back muscles for some other task that is actually necessary. However, if you are inclined to do some light pruning, here are some examples of how NOT to prune your trees.



Image Credit Dr. Gary Knox



Image credit Dave Bowman/MBR



Image credit setexastrees.com

I would also like to mention that if you do find yourself constantly battling the overgrowth of your Crape Myrtle tree, you may have the wrong size tree in your landscape. You may want to consider replacing or relocating your tree. There are a wide variety of Crape Myrtles that grow in our area and they range in size from 1-2 ft ground covers, 1-3 ft dwarf shrubs and up to 30 ft or more for trees. Visit Fanik Nursery's website for a great selection that is perfect for our area. They have an online chart, that you can find in the below link, that provides all the characteristics of the different varieties.

<https://www.fanicknursery.com/plantdbTreesOrnamental.html>

If your tree doesn't bloom, the most common issues are (1) improper pruning / pruning too much off the tree / pruning at the wrong time, (2) not enough sunlight, (3) not enough water, (4) too much water, (5) disease / scale / aphids / mites / powdery mildew / blackspot, (6) excessive fertilizer.

Bexar County Master Gardeners are available to help you with your gardening questions. We provide unbiased, research-based, locally relevant gardening information as a free service to the public. You can reach us Monday through Friday between 9 am and Noon and 1pm and 4 pm by calling 210-631-0400. Ask to speak to a Master Gardener. The Hotline is not available on county holidays.



Photo credit www.accgov.com



Photo credit SouthernLiving.com / Guide to Crepe Myrtles

Examples of well pruned Crape Myrtles

Happy Gardening!
Candy Roach