

STOP! Don't Chop!

"CRAPE MURDER" = 6 months of Ugly EVERY Year!



**Topping or
Hat Racking**



Pollarding

The objectives of pruning a crape myrtle are to maintain its natural sculptural form, produce strong branches that hold flowers upright, and open up its center to reveal the smooth, multi-toned bark that forms on mature trunks and branches. Cutting it back to thick stubs each year makes these goals impossible.

An unpruned crape myrtle is almost always superior in appearance to a "professionally" pruned one. Some things in nature are hard to improve on.

Results of Aggressive Pruning or Topping:

- Shorter bloom time
- Delayed flowering
- Weaker branching
- Potential increase in insect & disease problems
- Shorter life expectancy
- Unnatural, stubby form prevalent all winter, every winter
- Violation of City code; potential Code Enforcement action

The Only Pruning Crape Myrtles Require:

Young trees:

- Thin out, leaving 3 to 7 main trunks
- Remove any new suckers from the ground or from trunks

As needed, remove:

- Dead branches
- Damaged branches
- Diseased branches
- Disarranged branches (crossing limbs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hZJRWkRH5M>

Additional tip pruning may be used to promote the growth of new flowering shoots. Limit your pruning to branches that are no larger in diameter than your finger. Cutting back larger diameter limbs does promote shoot development, but is not recommended. It creates a weakly branched tree as a result of all the new growth flushing from one point. The method also ruins the natural form of the tree.

Remove suckers from the base anytime they develop. It is best to maintain 3-7 main trunks (stems). Single stem specimen trees are commercially available, but the tree's natural disposition is to be multi-stemmed.

A well-pruned crape myrtle has architectural form and a graceful appearance; a poorly pruned crape myrtle is one where the top has been thoughtlessly and indiscriminately hacked back to a knob or stub.

When to prune:

Late Winter (February or March) to avoid winter damage of any new growth.

Resources:

“Stop! Don't Chop Crepe (Crape) Myrtles!”

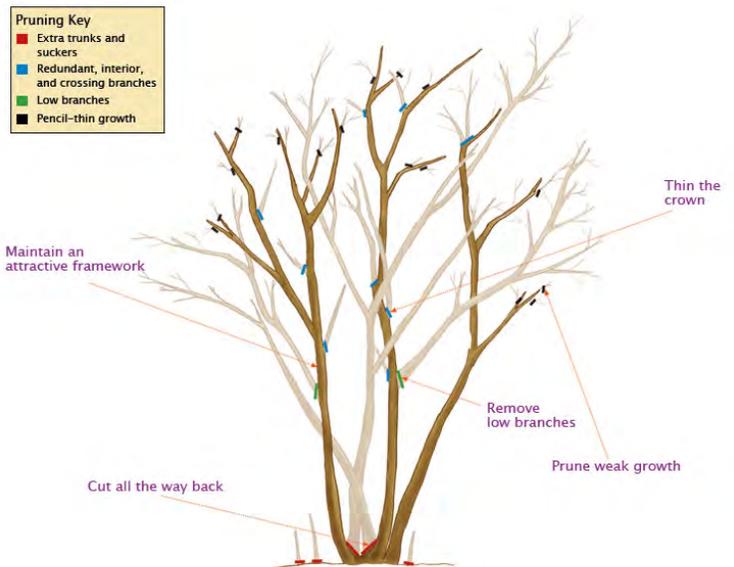
<http://www.southernliving.com/home-garden/gardens/stop-dont-chop-crepe-myrtles>

“Crepe (Crape) Myrtle Pruning Step-by-Step”

<http://thedailysouth.southernliving.com/2009/02/24/what-concerns-p/>

“How Do I Prune Crape Myrtle?”

<https://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/2013/02/how-do-i-prune-crape-myrtle/>



Restoring Your Crape Murdered “Tree”

Two options for rehabilitating a "murdered" crape myrtle

Method One:

Choose the strongest two or three well-spaced sprouts from each stub and remove all of the other sprouts.

During the growing season, pinch off any suckers and unwanted lateral growth. This will encourage the remaining sprouts to be stronger and the canopy of the tree to be airier.

If you follow this procedure for a couple of seasons, the tree is sure to be much improved in health and appearance.

Method Two:

The more drastic technique is to cut the tree back to within one to two inches of the ground while the tree is dormant.

After two to three weeks of growth, select three to five of the most vigorous, well-spaced, new shoots and remove all others.

Side branches should also be removed from the lower half of the remaining shoots. Each year, as the plant grows taller, additional lower branches can be removed, so the canopy begins 3 to 4 feet above ground level.

Continue to remove suckers (new young succulent sprouts that grow from the base) periodically in order to maintain the desired tree shape. Some landscapers apply a synthetic plant growth regulator, called NAA (naphthalene acetic acid), to suckers after pruning to prevent them from resprouting.

Within three to five years, you will again have a natural-looking crape myrtle.



A "restored" crape myrtle tree