

DON'T COMMIT CREPE MURDER

Whether you spell it “crepe myrtle” or “crape myrtle,” Lagerstroemia indica is a classic southern small tree or shrub that is a popular substitute for northern lilacs here in the Deep South. It’s often the victim of “crape murder,” a severe topping of the tree that is supposed to increase blooming but does real damage to the overall health of the tree. It is important to prune your crape myrtle correctly, in February, while it is dormant.

- ❖ **Remove suckers from the bottom of the plant.** Remove any damaged and diseased branches. Remove branches that are crossing or rubbing against each other, trimming the weaker of the two limbs.
- ❖ **Thin out small twiggy growth,** particularly small branches that are growing back into the plant, to allow air to better circulate.
- ❖ **Most nurseries recommend** pruning the tips of branches to remove old flowers that remain from last summer’s bloom. If old blooms are removed, a second blooming may occur.
- ❖ **If your crape myrtle was the victim of “crape murder,” you have two options.** First one: Pick the two or three strongest sprouts from each stub and remove the rest, nurturing the survivors for the next couple of seasons and removing other sprouts as they emerge. Or, while the tree is dormant, cut it back to within one to two inches of the ground. Two or three weeks later, select three to five of the most vigorous new shoots on each trunk and remove all others. Remove any new shoots that emerge later. Within three to five years, you will again have a natural-looking crape myrtle.
- ❖ **Excellent links;**
<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C944#Pruning>
<http://www.walterreeves.com/landscaping/shrubs/crapemyrtle-pruning>

