



Let's get excited about Crape Myrtles

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Crape Myrtles are easy to grow. They are also the state's official shrub.

Photo contributed by Phyllis Elmore

“I’m so excited and I just can’t hide it!” These words are meant to be sung loudly. This song was recorded in 1982 by The Pointer Sisters. These lyrics describe how I feel about crape myrtles, the Texas State Shrub.

Crape myrtles are showy and require very little effort to maintain. Their explosion of colorful blooms have just started this month. We will all enjoy their beauty not only in our yards but all around Victoria and neighboring communities. How cool is that?

According to the Farmers' Almanac, summer officially starts June 21, 2023. However, in our part of Texas, summer has arrived. If you have spent any time outdoors, you will agree with me.

The Texas climate can be hard on our plants. The lovely plants grown in Northern states will not stand up to the heat that Texas has. May I introduce to you the Lagerstroemia indica otherwise known as the crape myrtle? This versatile, beautiful plant is great for our hot weather. Also, it attracts bees and provides a place for birds to nest.

The colorful blossoms of this plant resemble the wrinkles in crêpe paper. Although, to me, the ruffles remind me of a cancan dancer's petticoats. This deciduous plant is native to China and Korea. It is referred to as the "Lilac of the South."

It is classified as a hardwood tree, shrub or sub-shrub. The bark is decorative. According to Doug Welsh, "The number of trunks a crape myrtle has affects the ultimate size of the plant: the fewer the trunks, the taller the plant."

The crape myrtle will bloom all summer long. Oo La La. The showy blooms can be white, pink, purple, or even red. The foliage is a dark green, changing to yellow, orange and red in the fall.

Crape myrtles are hardy from USDA Zone 6 through 9. They require full sun, for at least six hours per day. There are dwarf varieties that grow 2 to 5 feet tall. The semi dwarf shrubs are 3 to 6 feet. Other varieties can be 6 to 12 feet. The taller crape myrtles are 15 to 25 feet high.

With all of this beauty awaiting you it is time to get busy. Pick a sunny spot. Choose the plant's desired height. Decide on the color that you want. Select a mildew resistant crape myrtle. Dig your hole. Plant, water it and enjoy watching it grow.

What is not to love about this plant? For one thing, the crape myrtle is subject to powdery mildew. Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that can be treated with an organic fungicide like Neem oil. Another recommended remedy is to make a spray of 2 or 3 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar in one-gallon of water and spray all over its leaves.

Another problem is crape myrtle bark scale, also known as CMBS. The scale is a small insect that appears as a white or gray encrustation and leaves a black sooty mold on tree bark. Using a dormant control oil will resolve it.

Both these problems can be controlled with diligence and patience. Just don't give up.

While crape myrtles come in many sizes, one crape myrtle has been named a Texas superstar. Basham's party, pink crape myrtle was named for Bill Basham, a Houston horticulturist. Texas superstars have been proven to produce outstanding results and thrive all over Texas.

In conclusion, the crape myrtle (*Lagostroemia indica*) has been honored with the title of the official state shrub of Texas. Let's get excited about that. Instead of a salute, let's give this crape myrtle a rousing high kick routine. On second thought, perhaps a salute would be safer, no need to involve the Victoria Fire department and EMS personnel.

The Gardener's Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Victoria County. Mail your questions in care of the Advocate, P.O. Box 1518, Victoria, TX 77901; or vcmg@vicad.com, or comment on this column at [Victoria Advocate.com](http://VictoriaAdvocate.com).

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