

Pruning Crapemyrtles: When, Why and How

No summer would be the same without the prolific blooms, colorful fall foliage and distinctive bark of crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). This well-loved ornamental shrub/small tree graces country, suburban and urban landscapes throughout Oklahoma.

But all too often, these beautiful specimens are severely cut back, their canopies hacked and disfigured down to knobby stubs due to either ignorance or false information. Unfortunately, incorrect pruning negatively affects not just the shape, but the overall health of the tree. This kind of pruning causes large wounds causing disease and insect susceptibility. The subsequent spindly growth bends under the weight of the flower heads and struggles to form strong branches in the course of a season, after which, it will likely be poorly pruned again.

Read on for information on when and how to prune these mainstays of your garden.

Why Should Crapemyrtles Be Pruned?



The best reasons to prune are:

1. Removing dead or competing branches.
2. Redirecting branches if growth is impacted by nearby structures.
3. Clearing suckers or weak vertical shoots from the base of the tree.
4. Snipping seed heads to encourage blooming.
5. Minor thinning to open crowded sections to allow better light exposure and airflow.

Often crapemyrtles are pruned for the purposes of completely reshaping, however; genetics dictate the overall shape of a shrub or tree. Aggressive pruning ("crape murder") will not result in a transformed habit. The best way to achieve the shape you desire is to select a tree or shrub that will mature that way. Otherwise, let the plant grow as designed.

When to Prune Crapemyrtles

Light corrective pruning can be performed anytime during the year, major pruning should be done in late winter or early to spring, as they bloom on new growth.

How to Prune Crapemyrtles

When considering pruning, decide first if pruning is necessary. Always prune to align with the natural shape, and do not “top” from the canopy down. As a rule of thumb, try not to prune live branches larger than the diameter of your finger.



Check for suckers, misshapen, dead or crossing branches, or those rubbing against or growing into structures.

When trimming, cut close at the collar of the branch. Always cut back to the next limb or trunk, leaving no stub. Use of sharp tools and standard [appropriate pruning methods](#) apply to avoid injury and disease or insect vulnerability.

With some sharp tools, strategy and a little know-how, anyone can prune their crepe myrtles appropriately to ensure these showstoppers remain healthy to bloom in the landscape for years to come.

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Resources:

[Oklahoma Gardening: Managing Crapemyrtles](#)

[Pruning Ornamental Trees, Shrubs and Vines: OSU Fact Sheet HLA-6409](#)

[How to Prune Crapemyrtles: Mississippi State University Extension Service](#)

[Prune Crapemyrtles Properly: LSU AgCenter](#)

[Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder: Lagerstroemia indica](#)