

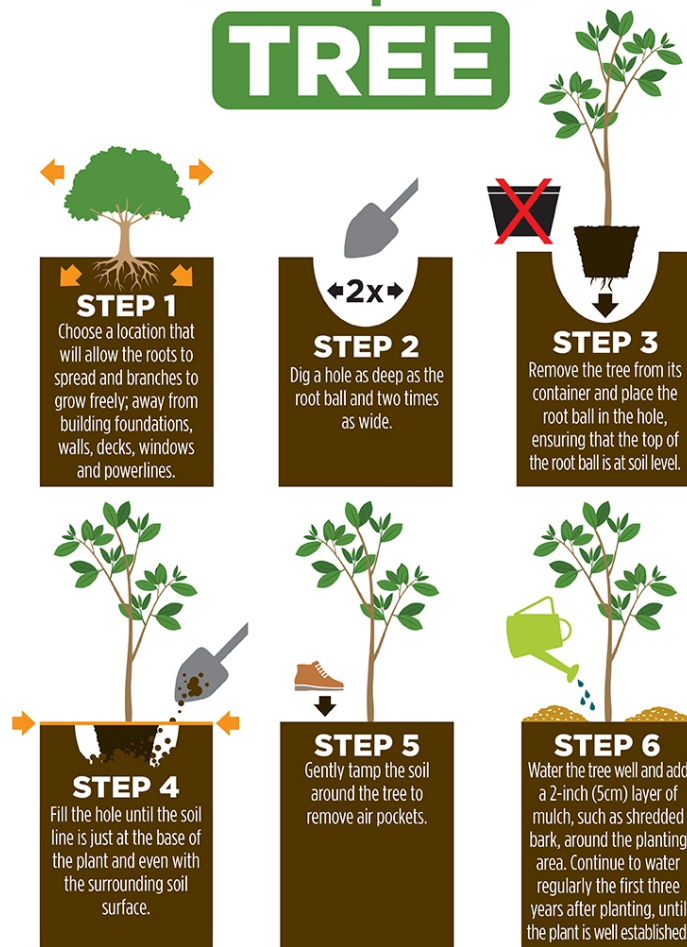
# USE & CARE MANUAL



## CRAPE MYRTLES (Lagerstroemia Indica)

### PLANTING GUIDE:

### How to plant a **TREE**



STEP 1) First, decide on a planting location. Consider carefully what kind of sun, soil, and growing-space your tree or shrub will need.

STEP 2) Once you've located the perfect spot, the hole you are digging must be at least double the width and as deep as the root system you are planting.

STEP 3) The top of the root system should be level with the ground. Before placing the tree or shrub in the hole, use your hands to gently break up the root system.

STEP 4) Once the tree is in place, backfill the hole with native soil and any leftover potting material.

STEP 5) Pack down the soil to eliminate any air pockets.

STEP 6) When finished, water thoroughly.

(continued below)

## **PLANTING CARE:**

The crape myrtle prefers well-draining clay, loam, or sandy soils. The pH level of the soil should be 5.5 to 7.5. Mulch in the spring & fall. The mulch should be about 4-6 inches deep (acid mulch, pine bark or oak leaves). Keep mulch a few inches away from the trunk of the tree. Do not mulch with mushroom compost.

### **Fertilization**

Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer in the spring as soon as the leaves appear and again in two months.

A complete general-purpose garden fertilizer — such as 8-8-8, 10-10-10, 12-4-8 or 16-4-8 — is ideal for crape myrtle. To newly planted small plants (1-gallon size), apply 1 teaspoon of fertilizer monthly from March to August along the perimeter of the planting hole. Larger, established plants will benefit from one broadcast application of fertilizer in spring. Apply 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 at a rate of 1 lb. per 100 sq. ft. or 12-4-8 or 16-4-8 at a rate of ½ lb. per 100 sq. ft. Avoid over-fertilization because it causes excess growth and reduced flowering. The best time to fertilize is just before a rain. Otherwise, water in the fertilizer after application with irrigation. It is not necessary to remove mulch when fertilizing.

### **Water**

The first year is a critical time for your new crape myrtle. It has not had time to establish itself yet and therefore is not as strong as an older shrub. To prevent the plant from dying, it must be watered once a week.

For best growth and production, crape myrtle should receive at least one inch of water a week. During dry spells, water is mandatory. If not properly watered during dry spells, flowers may be mitigated. Keep at least 4 feet around the shrub clear of grass and weeds, for less competition for water.

Once your tree reaches maturity, it will be naturally drought-resistant.

### **Pruning**

Crape myrtle flowers on new growth of the season, so if you choose to prune, do so in the dormant season, i.e. later winter to early spring before growth resumes. Avoid pruning in early fall before the first frost, because pruning forces new growth and keeps the plant from going dormant. Severe freezes can kill the plant if it is not fully dormant.

It is a common misconception that crape myrtles require pruning in order to flower. This is not only false but has also resulted in virtually millions of plants being pruned very aggressively, a practice commonly referred to as "crape murder." The most natural and beautiful crape myrtle trees result from limited or no pruning. In addition, aggressive pruning leads to increased suckering (shoots arising from below-ground roots) which is not only undesirable but it could result in powdery mildew spreading from the suckers to the canopy of the tree. Aphids are also attracted to the succulent growth which results from aggressive pruning.

It is far better to plant dwarf, or semi-dwarf varieties which grow to desired mature heights than to continue fighting with a more vigorous, larger cultivars planted in a too-small space.

If you choose to prune however, follow the simple steps: First, remove suckers from the base of the plant. Second, as the tree grows, remove lower branches from the bottom third of the tree to expose the trunk character. Last, remove crowded or crossing branches from the canopy.

The seedheads are an attractive feature and should be left on the tree. As the new growth pushed in the spring, the seedheads fall off. Some folks find that objectionable; if desired the seedheads can be removed by heading back to above where a leaf joins the stem, or if no leaves are present, just above a lateral bud. On some cultivars, pruning to remove spent flower blossoms after they fade will stimulate new growth and another blossom flush in late summer. A second bloom is sometimes difficult to force on cultivars that bloom after mid-July.

Crape myrtles in tree form make wonderful accent plants or specimen trees. Many cultivars develop attractive trunks with exfoliating bark that add interest to the winter garden. To develop a tree shape, select three to five radially-spaced branches slightly leaning to the outside, these will become the main trunks. spaced shoots growing from ground level as the main trunks. Then remove side branches from these shoots about halfway up their height. As the plant grows taller, more lower branches can be removed each year so the canopy begins 3 to 4 feet above ground level. You may also need to remove suckers (new young succulent spouts 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 re-sprouting.

