**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**“Crepe Myrtle Troubleshooting”**

Crepe myrtles are an important part of San Antonio landscapes. There is a crepe myrtle variety for every function in the full sun landscape, from groundcover through small tree. Crepe myrtle blooms are available in many shades of lavender, pink, white, and red. Some selections even have decorative bark. Crepe myrtles are drought tolerant so fit well in our quest to have water efficient landscapes. For all their desirable characteristics, they are not issue free. Here are some issues that crepe myrtle owners are facing; and would-be owners should consider.

Issue – Why aren’t my crepe myrtles blooming as much as others in the neighborhood?

Every crepe myrtle variety has a different bloom period and every planting situation is a little different so there is often a difference in bloom periods.

Crepe myrtles bloom best in full sun situations. As surrounding trees grow over established crepe myrtles, the shading increases and bloom period is reduced.

Crepe myrtles bloom on new wood. If a plant is not producing new growth because of lack of water (or too much water), a lack of fertility, or compacted soil – there will be limited bloom. Apply a small amount (1 cup of slow release lawn fertilizer for two to three inches of stem diameter) to the root system every spring to encourage new growth. Aerate compacted soil so water, oxygen, and nutrients can enter the soil

Crepe myrtles are drought tolerant but even drought tolerant plants benefit by regular rain or irrigation. The drought in 2011 affected many plants and slowed down the plant’s ability to bloom in 2012.

Powdery mildew and aphids will also reduce bloom.

The color of the flowers on your crepe myrtle is a good indicator of how much your plants will bloom. The spectrum runs from lavender through red. Lavender selections usually bloom the most followed by pink and white with reds often blooming one-half the period as the lavenders.

Issue – My “watermelon red” crepe myrtle leaves are crinkly and covered with a white coating.

The problem is caused by a powdery mildew, which is a weather related fungus disease. It shows up on susceptible crepe myrtle varieties when the weather is humid and mild. Most modern hybrids are powdery mildew resistant. All those varieties with Indian names fit that category. Your nursery should have a list of crepe myrtles that they sell that includes resistance to powdery mildew. Those selections with the Indian names (Natchez, Sioux, Catawba, etc.) are resistant. You can also find a list of crepe myrtles with pictures and descriptions on “[www.plantanswers.com](http://www.plantanswers.com).”

If you have a non-resistant variety, you can try a labeled fungicide but most gardeners just wait for the weather to change and the plant to grow out of the disease.

Issue – My crepe myrtle’s leaves are sticky and black!

Crepe myrtles are susceptible to feeding by aphids. The insects excrete a sugary material called “honeydew”. If the population of aphids becomes large, the honeydew accumulates and serves as a growing site for sooty mold.

Sooty mold will wash off if it is sprayed with the hose or is rained on early in its development. Once it is in place for several weeks however, it is hard to remove. The severely covered leaves may fall off but usually they continue to function on the plant as the mold gradually disappears.

Aphids can be controlled with soapy water sprays or neem oil. Insecticides that are more potent easily kill aphids but are not usually recommended for control because they also kill the beneficial insects that help control aphids. Aphids can more quickly recover from an insecticide treatment than the ladybugs, lacewings, and other beneficial insects that help control aphids.

Issue – My crepe myrtle has grown too tall. Can I prune it in half?

Crepe myrtles respond fine to pruning but the easiest solution to this issue is to pick the variety of crepe myrtle that has a mature size that fits your planting site perfectly. They are available in every size you can imagine from groundcover to 40 feet tall.

Your favorite nursery should have a list of the crepe myrtle varieties they sell that also provides information on flower color, mature size, powdery mildew resistance, bark characteristics, and growth habit (multi-stemmed, single trunk, etc.) It may also tell you the estimated bloom period.

Plantanswers.com also offers such a list along with pictures of the various varieties.

Issue – Crepe myrtles require too much pruning.

We have become use to pruning crepe myrtles severally to control size and to stimulate new wood for bloom protection. The plants, however, do not need all the pruning to which they are subjected. A healthy crepe myrtle produces plenty of new growth to maintain bloom even if they are not pruned. They certainly do not need to be subjected to the severe pruning that results in the ugly stubs that we see in some landscapes.