

Stop the Crape Murder!

By: Melinda Sperl

Crape Murder is in progress again! Seeing this again begs me to repeat this article hoping to stop one more Crape Myrtle from being ruined.

When Crapes are "murdered" the limbs are cut in the same place every year which blocks the vascular system that feeds the plant. Those ugly "bulges" that form on the tree are actual scar tissue which eventually blocks nutrients from getting to branch ends. This is where the flowers form. No nutrients, no blooms.

The resultant of unhealthy plants is attractants for insects and disease. Black sooty mold is the excretion of the insects that forms black mold. Crapes trimmed in this fashion are a prime breeding ground for insects.

How should these colorful plants be trimmed? Crape Myrtles are actually large shrubs grown as trees. Each year they can be trimmed correctly by cutting off the dead flower tips, cutting any inside or cross growing unsightly branches to lightly shape it. This is exactly as you cut a large tree. If height is a problem, you can cut the branch lengths but not in the same place each year. Cutting a branch each year in the exact same place creates knob-like formations on the branches that are unnatural and unhealthy.

If your tree is already damaged, each year trim off one or two of the damaged branches and eventually the crape will recover. It is not advised to cut all damaged branches off at one time as you may lose the entire plant. The 1/3 rule is good to remember in which you trim only 1/3 of the plant. Wait until the plant is obviously recovering from this trimming then trim another 1/3 and repeat until reaching the design shape or height.

It is amazing but Mother Nature really does know how to grow plants without our help. Crapes do not have to be trimmed, old blooms do not have to be removed and they will do perfectly well without our help.

Please, stop the Crape Murder!

Happy Gardening!

Melinda Sperl is a Horticulturalist and the owner of Dream Landscape Design, Inc. You can reach Melinda at Melinda@dreamlandscapedesign.com or www.dreamlandscapedesign.com