

Only YOU can Prevent Crape MURDER!

By Jennifer Welshans-Pelham, Extension Faculty - Horticulture

Unfortunately, crape murder is the most excessive and unwarranted copycat crime committed in Florida during the early spring. Professional landscapers do it, your neighbors do it, so why shouldn't you? Crape murder or "topping" is a pruning practice that is unnecessary and a waste of your energy and time. Don't feel obligated that you need to prune your crape myrtles at the same height every year in order to have beautiful plants. Here are some myths and facts about pruning crape myrtles.

Myth: Many professional landscapers and homeowners top their crape myrtles every year, so they must know what they are doing.

Fact: Although topping crape myrtles has been a common practice in the past, it is not a recommended practice now and, as we know, old habits are hard to change.

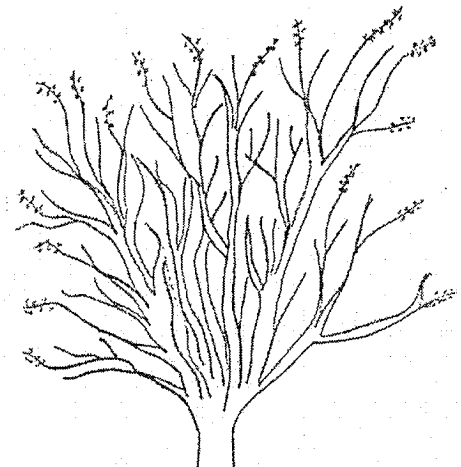
Myth: Crape myrtles need to be pruned at the same point each year in order to produce many flowers.

Fact: Research from the University of Florida has shown that pruning only the seed heads from the crape myrtles and no branches over a pencil-width in diameter will actually produce more flower heads than topping the tree.

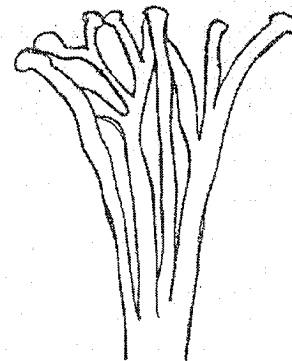
Myth: Crape myrtles need to be topped in order to keep a clean, small tree for the landscape.

Fact: Crape myrtles are available in many varieties, that come in all sizes from small shrubs, that are only a few feet tall, to trees that can grow over 30 feet tall. Choose the variety of crape myrtle that will fit the space you have to offer. Also, to keep them looking clean, remove the "suckers" that grow from the base of the plant. It is ok to prune out some branches in order to see through the crape myrtles, just don't prune to see over them.

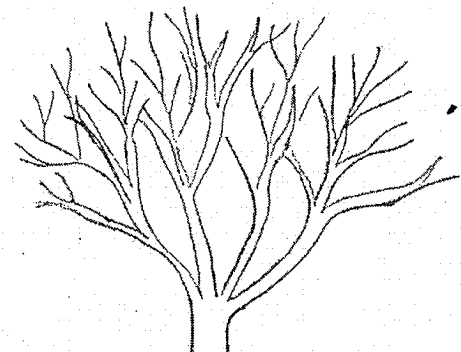
For more information on the maintenance and varieties of crape myrtles, contact your local University of Florida IFAS Extension office.



Unpruned



"Crape Murder"



Properly Pruned