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I 'On is Growing!

The homeowners' guide to gardening and landscaping in the I'On Community

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A tale of 3 Crape Myrtles

... by Barbara Fry

Don't you just love Crape Myrtles? They're such an unusual tree. Not only can you appreciate the spring foliage, summer flowers, and fall color change (*in some*), but you get the added advantage of interest in the winter with the beautiful sculptural aspect of the trunk and branches. Truly a year round asset to any landscape plan.

You can chose single but I love the multi-trunk varieties with smooth bark – some with distinct variations in color. Then there's the canopy of leaves that allows dappled sunlight through while still offering protection from the hot summer sun. The flowers (*they look like upside down lilacs to us northerners*) in beautiful colors that range from white to pink to lavender to rose to raspberry red. And the variety in size makes it darn near impossible not to find the perfect tree for any particular landscape need.

That's what we were thinking when we decided to plant three "Fantasy" Crape Myrtles in our courtyard last winter. They are a taller variety of the tree – 30+ feet – with a high, broad canopy, white summer flowers, a "vase-like" trunk which is quite elegant, and beautiful cinnamon/red exfoliating bark. *Don't they sound wonderful?* We thought so too.

But, we have a slight problem. We put them in last February and have yet to see a leaf. Needless to say, not the effect we were going (*or hoping*) for. While most would assume at this point the trees are dead (*they sure look that way!*), we've been assured

otherwise. Or more accurately, they "probably" aren't.

It seems the nursery our trees were purchased from had a batch of our myrtles (*we're talking a dozen or so*) that just aren't leafing out. Rumor has it that the trees – after they were dug and bundled – may have gone through a frost which stressed them and caused their buds to drop. A typical frost would not have had this effect, but because the trees were out of the ground and under some stress already, the frost pushed them to self-protect and cut-off energy to the buds. So, where does that leaf us..?

We've talked to several people who should know about these things (*a well-known local arborist; another from Clemson Extension; our landscape designer; and of course the guy that put them in...*) and they've all concurred that the trees may come back. *Because...* if you scrape a little bark away to expose the underlying tissue, it is green. So, the trees are alive, just in shock. Well, we're kind of in shock too.

So we've decided to wait. The fact that part of our newly installed terrace will have to be torn up if they need to be replaced helped us make that decision. The nursery has extended the warranty and we're thinking the trees should wake up any day now. At least we hope.

So ... to capture the canopy effect we were looking so forward to this summer, we've invested in some lovely beach umbrellas. Ask me next spring if I'm still crazy about Crape Myrtles.

July To Do's

Michael Carriera, the Turf and Shrub Services Manager at Lawn-O-Green, Inc, has these recommendations for July:

Now is a good time to fertilize your lawn.

Saint Augustine Grass.

If a disease is present in the lawn do not use nitrogen, instead use Iron (*and be sure to bag clippings!!!*). Grey Leaf Spot Fungus is very prevalent this time of year. Apply fungicide as needed. Liquids (*Mancozeb or Daconil*) are best for grey leaf spot fungus.

If you do not have fungus, you can fertilize with a combination fertilizer and insect control that also has Iron in the product.

Centipede Grass.

Fertilize with low nitrogen (5-10-31). Use a lot of Iron for color (*at least 10%*).

Treat for insects. Use *Sevin* or *Permethrin* for the control of chinch and spittle bugs, fire ants, mole crickets and other insects. Apply *Merit* or *Asephate* to control scale, white fly, beetles or caterpillars.

Watch for signs of drought stress in your lawn. Make sure to water adequately. Water early in the morning (*no later than 9 a.m.*); never at night. Be careful not to over water especially in areas of poor drainage.

Spot treat weeds.

Shrubs. Prune back dead and low hanging limbs (*do this before you apply any insecticide*).

10 Ways to KILL your grass ... by Bill Lamson-Scribner

(Editor's note: I have had a few conversations with Bill Lamson-Scribner of Possum's Landscape and Pest Control Supply, and he has given me permission to reprint advice from his Horticultural Hotline column featured weekly in the Moultrie News. Here's one of his latest that I thought was highly appropriate.)

Just a little reminder for the summertime grass-mowing season – 10 Ways to KILL your grass:

1. **Mow with a dull mower blade.** This will rip the grass creating more entry points for disease.
2. **Always mow your grass at the lowest possible setting.** If you mow it real low it will look like a golf course and you will not have to mow it as often.
3. **If you run out of gas while mowing, refill the mower on the grass.** When you overfill the mower you will have a beautiful dead area for a good while.
4. **Mow whenever you feel like it.** Let the grass get 5 to 6 inches tall then cut it down to one inch.
5. **Never fill in low spots in your yard with cotton burr compost.** They make perfect places to collect water and encourage disease, and if they are deep enough, you can scalp the grass as well.
6. **When mowing with a riding mower, you can kill your trees and grass if you get the side that does not discharge up against the tree.** Turn the steering wheel as sharp as possible – then spin your tires in a circle around the tree girding the tree and killing the grass at the same time.
7. **When putting out fertilizer and weed killer, more is better.** Never read a label, after all, it is only the Federal Law. Never use pre-emergent herbicide so you can kill weeds in the heat of the summer, when most labels say "Do Not Use."
8. **Water in the evening when you get home from work.** This way the grass will stay wet for long periods of time giving diseases a good advantage.
9. **Do not soil test, remove thatch, or aerate.** Only professional's who are taking care of golf courses, sports turf fields, schools and other high priority turf need to do this.
10. **Treat your yard for insects and disease whenever you see an ad on TV, in the newspaper or on a garden center's marquee sign.** Do not treat your yard based on life cycles of insects or time of year for disease. If you wait long enough before you treat, you could kill your whole lawn! Fertilize the same way. Cheap fertilizer is a great deal. And remember in the fall when the winterizer for Fescue is advertised here, put out double the amount! **And most important, never, ever get on a "Possum Program."**

Bill Lamson-Scribner can be reached at Possum's Landscape and Pest Control Supply, 886 Whipple Road in Mount Pleasant (971-9601); or 3325 Business Circle in North Charleston (760-2600). On Saturday mornings you can call in questions to the "Garden Clinic" from 9:00-11:00 a.m. on 94.3 FM WSC (721-TALK).

Plant Profile ... *Crape Myrtle*



Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* species) is a handsome flowering tree that is easy to grow and care for in the southeast. It is native to Asia, but has fully naturalized here. They grow at a moderate to fast rate, and have an average to long life span. Trees grow to heights ranging from 10 to 30 feet with widths of 15 to 25 feet. If care is taken to choose a variety with the appropriate maximum size for space allowed, it should never need top pruning. Some pruning of lower branches may be needed and can help determine if the shape of the plant will be that of a tree or a shrub.

The picture at the right illustrates the uniqueness of some crape myrtle trunks and branches, not only showing variation in color, but the fact that the bark peels back or “exfoliates” to show the surface layers.

The size of crape myrtles can be increased significantly by applications of deep root fertilizer, however the blooms will be greatly reduced until the tree uses up the excess nutrients. Newly planted crape myrtles benefit greatly from additional irrigation the first two years after planting. After this initial two-year period, they should become very drought tolerant and require little care. Crape myrtles like full sun and will not bloom well in shade.

Clemson University’s Extension Service offers a host of information on crape myrtles to help with selection, care and maintenance as well as disease prevention. On the WEB, go to <http://hgic.clemson.edu>.



Deep Watering tip

... from Larry Taylor

I bought a root feeder many years ago which can be used for fertilizing, but I primarily use it for watering trees and large shrubs. It was not expensive and I don’t know of any disadvantages. The plus is water supplied this way does not run off or evaporate. The water is provided a foot or so underground so the roots travel down, not up, to reach it. It makes for more efficient watering and a sturdier plant.

Local Attractions

Palmetto Gardening

Tuesdays at Noon.
Live, call-in segment on “Your Day,” Clemson Extension Service Educational Radio Network, WSCI 89.3 FM.

The Garden Clinic

Saturday’s,
9:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Tune in to Bill Lamson-Scribner’s weekly radio gardening show on 94.3 WSC FM.

Gateway Walk

Monday – Friday,
8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
A self-guided walking tour through the heart of the Historic District. Originated in 1930, the walk connects the areas between Archdale Street and Philadelphia Alley. A project of the Garden Club of Charleston. For more information, send an email to lmetzler6@comcast.net.

Lowcountry Rose Society

September 12, 7:00 p.m.
“Roses in the Landscape” by Dr. Satish Prabhu, Village Church of Christ, 736 Savage Road. For more information, email roses@charlestonrose.com.

Farmer’s Markets

Charleston –
Saturday’s through December,
8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Marion Square on Calhoun Street (between King and Meeting).

Mount Pleasant –
Tuesday’s through October,
4:00 p.m. until dark.
Moultrie Middle School on Coleman Boulevard.

Contact us

I'd like to thank those who contributed to this month's issue. Lawn-O-Green's **Mike Carriera** for his monthly to-do's; **Bill Lamson-Scribner** for his lawn advice and answer to our Garden question; **Larry Taylor** for his great watering tip; **Laura Kasman** for the question of the month; and **Claudia Robinson** for the beautiful crape myrtle photos. All contributions are heartily encouraged and greatly appreciated!

Due to the heat of the season, I've decided to take a month or two off. Look for the next issue in the early fall. Here's hoping you all (*y'all?*) have a happy, healthy, and safe summer!

If you have a comment on this issue, or would like to contribute to future issues, send an email to me, **Barbara Fry**, at brbfry@comcast.net.

For questions or concerns regarding your home landscaping, contact **Pam Gabriel, I'On Design Committee**, at 971-1662, ext 216.

For common area landscaping questions or concerns, call **Cheryl Wilson, AMCS, I'On Community Manager**

Ask the Gardener . . .

"I have a question about Podocarpus."

We planted a hedge of it several years ago and it's growing fine, but in the spring about half the bushes have extremely heavy growths of pollen "pods" which are unsightly and last for weeks. One bush produces blue berries instead, and a few of the bushes seem to produce neither pollen nor berries. The rest of the year the bushes look identical. Apparently Podocarpus has male and female forms (*wish we'd known!*). However, our question now is, is there some way to inhibit pollen "pod" formation?

Thanks – Laura Kasman

Answer from Bill Lamson-Scribner, Horticultural Hotline

Podocarpus are male and female and I know you can stop the fruit of them, but I'm not sure how to stop the male from producing the pollen sacks. They are gymnosperms like pine trees. Monterey makes a product called *Florel Fruit Eliminator* that would get rid of the fruit, but not the pollen. The best bet is to just physically remove the pollen pods. There are also injectable products available but they must be injected into 4-5 inch diameter trees or shrubs. These products are mainly used to remove gum balls from sweet gum trees and undesirable fruit from apple or crab apple or flowering pears.

Tip of the Month ... *Edge Trimming*

If you want to give your garden a real "space" lift, try trimming the edges of the sod and flower beds. Well-defined lawns and beds give a clean, crisp look that's pleasing to the eye while better defining individual spaces. And don't think clean lines are only for a formal look. Even "cottage" gardens can benefit from a little definition. You can use a straight edge spade, but for the best effect (*and to save your back*) use a weed eater or edging tool.

On the Web ...

<http://hgic.clemson.edu> is the site for Clemson Extension Home & Garden, our personal favorite for the unique horticultural environment in I'On.

www.yardcare.com offers a regional database of lawn care advice including how to's of planting, restoration, pest and disease control, watering, grass selection ...

<http://floridata.com> offers a great database to look up plants, shrubs and trees as well as a bookstore and discussion group.

www.almostedenplants.com is a retail site that also offers a great database with beautiful pictures. You can purchase plants online.

www.charlestonhorticulturalsociety.org is the site for the Charleston Horticultural Society that list lectures, events, membership information ...

www.charleston.net/features/features.aspx?section=garden is the Post and Courier's internet Home & Garden Calendar of Events.
