

Tree Profile: *Crepe Myrtle - Lagerstroemia indica*

General information: Crepe Myrtle is a genus of around 50 species of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs -native to the Indian subcontinent, southeast Asia, northern Australia and parts of Oceania. The species commonly used for bonsai is *Lagerstroemia indica* in colors white, pink, red or purple. It makes an excellent bonsai due to its exquisite branch ramification and the contrast of the red upon silver of the peeling bark.

Lighting and Temperature: Full sun, which helps to keep it relatively pest and fungus free and promotes flowering, but will need protection from hot as well as freezing winds.

Watering: The Crepe Myrtle Bonsai does need a well drained soil; it enjoys water - frequently in spring and moderately during the rest of the year. Reduce the watering in winter and just before flowering to encourage bud formation. To promote flowering, allow the soil to dry slightly (similar to bougainvillea). Avoid overwatering!

Feeding: Don't over-fertilize crepe myrtles. Recommended from spring to early autumn, every two weeks alternating a general purpose plant food or bonsai food with a low nitrogen tomato fertilizer. Do not feed during winter!

Pruning and wiring: The best and safest time is only in autumn, because it stimulates flower buds to form. You can cut back severely and allow it to grow for one season freely to thicken the trunk. The following season pinch back constantly to promote branch ramification!

Wiring can be done any time between spring and autumn, but take care of the delicate and brittle branches!

If unsure of wiring - styling can also be done quite easily by clip and grow!

Propagation: From seed in spring, softwood cuttings in late spring or semi-ripe cuttings with bottom heat in summer - use heal cuttings for better results.

Repotting: Crepe myrtles should be repotted every 1-3 years in the early spring before bud burst in a light, well drained soil with minimal root cutting. Position the roots during repotting!

Pests and diseases: Mealy bugs, scale, red spider mites and whiteflies can be a problem - tread with pesticide.

Powdery mildew can be avoided by providing good ventilation and plenty of light.

Styles: Informal Upright, Slanting, Cascade, Broom and Clump. The dwarf varieties make excellent shohin bonsai.

Pictures courtesy of Internet Bonsai Club!



The photos at the right are stock photos showing the crepe myrtle flowers. The tree at the left belongs to local enthusiast Mark L - a magnificent example.