‘Sacramento’ Crape Myrtle
*Lagerstroemia indica ‘Sacramento’*

Common Name: Crape myrtle
Scientific Name: *Lagerstroemia indica*
Plant Zone: 6 to 9
Plant Type: Deciduous shrub
Family: Lythraceae
Height: 18-24"
Bloom Time: July - September
Bloom Color: Deep Red
Light: Full sun
Water: Medium moisture
Maintenance: Medium

Developed from Worlds Fair, a deeper red, more compact, fuller more symmetrical growing variety. Leaves are smaller than Worlds Fair with many flower clusters. Very heavy bloomer 2nd year. Suited to all landscape uses and all container and basket uses.

The crape myrtle is called the "lilac of the south". Why these plants have become so popular over the years is easy to see. Their beauty and color can brighten even the most common garden. Their versatility and variety can excite even the most avid gardener. but creating new varieties of plants and trees designed for warmer climates takes years of research. Once you see the result, you would agree that tailor made plants are well worth the effort.

The crape myrtle is one of the hardiest, most versatile landscape plants around. It was first introduced into this country more than 150 years ago. Since then the popularity of crape myrtles has grown along with the number of varieties available today.

**Note to Crape Myrtle Lovers**
We are in an enviable position in North Florida because there is much work in progress related to crape myrtle. The North Florida Research and Education Center in Monticello has been collecting data for over 10 years.

Dr Gary Knox, Extension Specialist and Professor of Environmental Horticulture, maintains a collection containing 83 different cultivars and 6 species. Though growing at the research center, these plants are maintained under conditions that are very similar to residential landscape plantings. Information obtained from the plantings is regularly shared with Extension agents and the general public.
Several commercial plant nurseries across North Florida specialize in crape myrtle production and new cultivars are showing up on a regular basis. Most of the larger specialty nurseries are wholesale only - selling to retail nurseries and garden centers. Check retail plant offerings during the summer. Some of the newer crape myrtles are likely to show up!

**Dr. Gary Knox-UF horticulturalist:**

As a result of all of the breeding programs the past 20 years, crape myrtles are one of the most versatile summer flowering shrubs and trees that we have available these days. There's a crape myrtle for just about every function you would want in a landscape: a container plant, a ground cover, small shrub, medium shrub, patio tree, to even a good size medium tree.

Crape myrtle is a wonderful shrub, because it is as tough as it is beautiful. Crape myrtle is one of the best plants we have for the bright sun, for our poor sandy soils, for low fertility, and for low irrigation. It can withstand it all and still put on a good flowering show for everybody.

University of Florida researchers are busy testing nearly 85 different varieties of crape myrtles. They are looking at how well these plants handle Florida's diverse climate. The growth rate of the plants is monitored along with the ultimate height, color of the flower, fall color, bark color, and the length of the flowering period.

Because of these breeding improvements, crape myrtles have clearer colors, bloom for a longer period of time, and have larger flower panicles these days. On top of that, some of the cultivars have reddish colored leaves in the spring. Later on the leaves turn a dark green. When we get a good cool fall, they actually turn very bright fall color of red and gold and orange.

The bark is a very ornamental feature that's often overlooked in crape myrtles. The newer hybrids have very bright colored bark that tends to expose itself in midsummer, and will persist on into the wintertime.

Crape myrtles are one of the easiest plants to grow in your landscape and they make a perfect choice for environmentally conscious gardeners who practice the art of ELM, or environmental landscape management. It relates to crape myrtles because crape myrtles are very drought tolerant, you don't have to fertilize them much, and they can be used in your landscape to enhance biological control of pests.

The way crape myrtles help control pests is a bonus for gardeners. The main pest insect for this southern beauty is the crape myrtle aphid. Some very important insects feed on the aphid. Only crape myrtle aphids get on crape myrtles, and they don't spread to other plants. Beneficial insects like lady beetles are attracted to crape myrtle aphids, which are food for the lady beetles. The lady beetles then move from crape myrtles onto other plants in your landscape to control pests there.
While insects aren't really a problem for crape myrtles, some diseases can be. Powdery mildew appears as a dusty or powdery covering on the plant's leaves disfiguring the plant and making it unattractive. Fortunately, as a result of some breeding work done at the US National Arboretum about 20 years ago, a new species of crape myrtle was hybridized with our old fashioned crape myrtle. The result was disease resistant hybrid, so we no longer have a serious problem with powdery mildew.

Crape myrtles are also environmentally friendly because they attract bees, butterflies, and many other nectar-loving insects. You can really enhance a wildlife planting by providing nectar to these insects.

As far as maintenance goes, crape myrtles require very little... especially in the way of pruning. The crape myrtle is probably one of the most abused plants in our landscape today because people have a tendency to overprune them. If you buy a cultivar that's only going to grow to the height you want, then there is no need to prune it back every year. If you prune a crape myrtle very hard, you ruin the natural and very beautiful shape that a lot of crape myrtles will develop.

Buying the right size crape myrtle for the right location is very important in your selection process. Before you get caught up in choosing between all the different colors available, find out how tall the plant or tree will eventually become. There are different size categories for crepe myrtles. Small shrubs grow to about 4 feet over a 5 year period. Medium shrubs grow to about 12 feet over a 10 year period. Large shrubs or patio trees grow between 12 and 20 feet over a 10 year period. The tree form crape myrtles become over 20 feet tall. There's a new category called a miniature class, and these are especially adapted to hanging baskets, small pots, containers, and even for use as ground covers in the landscape.

Once you select the right size of your crape myrtle, it's time to wander through a rainbow of colors. The wild type of a crape myrtle color is more or less a fuchsia pink or a watermelon pink. Since those early days a clear pink color has been developed as well as tones that are almost a pure red, white, purple and lavender. Some newer varieties of crape myrtles have what we call bicolor flowers, where each flower petal will be edged in a different color, for example a red flower petal edged in white.

Although the crape myrtle is tailor made for many parts of Florida, it's not very salt tolerant so you should avoid planting it in coastal regions. As for the rest of the state, gardeners can put the welcome mat out for the lilac of the south.