

## Fact Sheet: Crepe Myrtles

A favourite and spectacular tree is the *Lagerstroemia indica*, or crepe myrtle. I planted one in my backyard about 12 years ago and it's absolutely amazing. I chose it because of its versatility. It flowers from early January through until the end of March, has beautiful spring growth, autumn foliage and a spectacular trunk, with patterned bark.

The *Lagerstroemia indica* species of crepe myrtle are probably the most widely available in Australia and flower in a range of colours - white, red, pink and deep mauve. The crepe myrtle flowers are wonderful - each petal is really like crepe paper, very wrinkly and crinkly, and that's where it gets its name. Remember that crepe myrtles can be grown as a standard, a miniature, a low-growing spreading plant, a small shrub, a small tree and even a large tree.

### **Some to look out for are:**

- *Lagerstroemia indica*, 'New Orleans' is available in shrub-form but can also be grown as a standard. It looks great in a large pot and is perfect for a courtyard garden.
- 'Natchez' - will eventually reach about eight metres and it's got a clear, white flower as well as quite spectacular markings on the trunk.
- The development of hybrids between the *L.indica* and the *L.fauriei* species has resulted in varieties of crepe myrtle that are resistant to a fungal disease known as powdery mildew, and that's a major problem that can afflict the older varieties of the crepe myrtle.
- Another hybrid is 'Yuma' with its fantastic mauve flowers
- There are also low-growing varieties such as 'Houston' which grows to about 60 to 70 centimetres high, spreads out to maybe a metre or a metre and a half. These plants are low-growing and have been specially selected to grow as standards.
- For white flowers in the garden, it's hard to go past 'Pixie White'. It grows to about two metres and suits garden beds, either growing singularly or as a massed feature.

All crepe myrtles grow well in Australia. They especially like a hot and dry climate. They transplant well from a pot or buy them as a bare-rooted plant in winter. Get them established with plenty of water, to ensure the root system develops well. Once established, crepe myrtles are remarkably drought-tolerant.

And pruning a crepe myrtle is really simple. Wait until the flowers have finished and then cut it back at least 30 centimetres. I like pruning quite hard because in spring the branch will shoot out with new growth. But if you don't want to prune, then just let the plant grow to its natural shape. Propagate crepe myrtles from hardwood cuttings taken in winter.