
Just Say NO to Topping Crape Myrtles!

*by Celeste White, Extension Agent, Commercial Landscape Maintenance
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This is the time of year when we often see crape myrtles unnecessarily topped: main stems that are several years old are cut back, often leaving branch stubs 2 - 5 inches or



more in diameter. In the case of crape myrtles, another name for this practice is "crape murder." Topping a crape myrtle is almost always unnecessary. Because people have seen this done in previous years, landscapers and home owners often mimic this practice, not realizing the unfortunate consequences.

Research at the University of Florida found that topping of crape myrtles can delay flowering up to one month. This research also found topping reduced the number of flowers and shortened the flowering season. Finally, topping stimulated more summer sprouting from roots and stems. Sprouting results in greater maintenance since sprouts are usually removed to maintain an attractive plant appearance.

If a crape myrtle requires routine pruning to fit into its surroundings, it could be replaced with a smaller maturing cultivar. Dwarf

crape myrtles mature at a height of 5 feet; medium crape myrtle cultivars grow up to about 15 feet in height, and tall or tree-size crape myrtle cultivars exceed 15 feet and often grow to 20 - 30 feet tall in 10 years.

If pruning is necessary, a general recommendation is to prune branches no greater than the size of your thumb.

More information here: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep399>