



## Lagerstroemia indica

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*Lagerstroemia indica* (crape myrtle, crepe myrtle, crepeflower) is a species in the genus *Lagerstroemia* in the family *Lythraceae*.

From China, Korea, Japan and Indian Subcontinent *Lagerstroemia indica* is an often multistemmed, deciduous tree with a wide spreading, flat topped, rounded, or even spike shaped open habit. Planted in full sun or under canopy, the tree is a popular nesting shrub for songbirds and wrens.

The bark is a prominent feature being smooth, pinkish-gray and mottled, shedding each year. Leaves also shed each winter, after spectacular color display, and bare branches re-leaf early in the spring; leaves are small, smooth-edged, circular or oval-shaped, and dark green changing to yellow and orange and red in autumn.

Flowers, on different trees, are white, pink, mauve, purple or carmine with crimped petals, in panicles up to 9 centimetres (3 1/2 in).

*Lagerstroemia indica* is frost tolerant, prefers full sun and will grow to 6 metres (20 ft) with a spread of 6 metres (20 ft). The plant is not picky about soil type but does require good drainage to thrive.

Once established it is also quite drought hardy, though it benefits from the occasional deep watering during the summer months.

15 hybrid cultivars have been developed between *L. indica* and *L. faueri* by the US National Arboretum for increased cold-hardiness and resistance to disease, all given the names of Native American tribes. There are also dwarf cultivars of *indica x faueri* cross-breeds and regular *L. indica* species, which grow between 2 and 5 feet (1.5 meters).

## Cultivation

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In the United States, *Lagerstroemia indica* is a very popular flowering shrub/small tree in mild-winter states (USDA Zones 7-10). Low maintenance needs make it a common municipal planting in parks, along sidewalks, highway medians and in parking lots. Like the Southern Magnolia, the Crape Myrtle has come to symbolize the American South because of its extensive planting and ability to thrive in hot, humid summer climates with regular precipitation. It is one of only a few trees/shrubs to offer brilliant color in late summer through autumn, at a time when many flowering plants have exhausted their blooms. *Lagerstroemia* is a common planting in South Atlantic States and is becoming an increasingly common shrub in Mid-Atlantic states all the way up through the coastal areas of Massachusetts. *Lagerstroemia* also thrives in the Mediterranean and Desert climates of Southern California, Arizona and Nevada. During the winter, gardeners will often lop off the branches of large specimens, to manage size and encourage more profuse summer bloom. This is colloquially known as "Crape Murder" because of the drastic pruning involved, leaving a bare trunk during the winter and early spring. The plant must have hot summers in order to flower successfully, otherwise it will show weak bloom and is more vulnerable to fungal diseases.

Frequently *L. indica* is root hardy to Zone 5 (-10 °F/-23 °C), meaning it will be killed back during harsh winters but regrow from the roots and flower in summer. As such Northern gardeners treat it more like a perennial than a tree or shrub. Too much watering and over-fertilizing can decrease the cold hardiness of *L. indica* because it stimulates new growth late in the season that does not have time to harden off.

## Diseases

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In the South mildew and fungal diseases have traditionally been a problem for *L. indica*. This was a major motivation for developing the *L. indica x L. faueri* hybrids, which show increased resistance to powdery mildew and fungus. The fungal pathogen *Cercospora lythracearum* can infest the plant in summer during hot, rainy weather and cause premature leaf drop. Planting a resistant hybrid or spraying with a fungicide can help control this.

Insect problems with *Lagerstroemia indica* include the crape myrtle aphid, *Tinocallis kahawaluokalani*, which can cause yellow spots and black mold, Japanese beetles, and the flea beetle. None of these insects are fatal to the plant and infestations usually resolve themselves through other predator insects; however applications of insecticidal soap can also be helpful.