

Do Crapemyrtles Really Need Pruning?

Paul Winski, Harris County Extension Agent, Horticulture

It is that time of the year when landscape crews are "pruning" the crape myrtles. I use the term "pruning" loosely since the practice is called "**Crape Murder**". The yearly topping/butchering of crape myrtle trees by landscape professionals has led to homeowners perpetuating the practice since they see it occurring in January and February throughout the county.

Crapemyrtles (*Lagerstroemia indica*) are plentiful in Harris and surrounding counties growing and flowering throughout the summer. They naturally grow as upright, vase-shaped trees with multiple trunks. Crapemyrtles provide landscape interest across multiple seasons; beautiful flowers in the properly placed crape myrtle will need little or no pruning in the landscape. Problems arise when we plant the wrong crape myrtle in the wrong place.

Trees are pruned to 1) reduce risk, 2) maintain or improve tree health and structure, 3) improve aesthetics, or 4) satisfy a specific need. If we consider the topping procedure of crape myrtles, the practice does not meet any of the requirements and contributes negatively to the overall health of the plant.



1) Topping a crape myrtle does not reduce risk to property or people in the area since the plant is being managed to a constant height year after year.

2) Topping does not maintain or improve tree health and structure. The constant topping reduces the size of the plant canopy, which decreases the plant's ability to produce food through photosynthesis. The branch stubs become larger over time resulting in more exposed wood that is susceptible to pests and diseases. Topping also results in an increased number of dead stubs and branches throughout the tree.

Do Crapemyrtles Really Need Pruning?

Continued



A common site in many landscapes.



This practice will lead to weakened growth and an increased potential for pest and disease problems.



A well-maintained planting of crape myrtles showing the desired growth habit.

3) The aesthetics of the crape myrtle is not improved by topping. The trees are quite unsightly after they are pruned, and the new growth in the spring is soft, fast-growing, and unable to hold the flower heads upright resulting in bending and breaking of branches. Flowering is also delayed with blooms not appearing until late July or early August.

4) Topping does not satisfy a specific need since we are artificially forcing a plant into an environment where it should not have been planted. Plant the right variety in the right place. Crapemyrtles are versatile, increased breeding has resulted in more than 100+ varieties ranging in size from 3 to 35 feet at maturity, there is a crape myrtle available for every landscape need.

If pruning is necessary, consider the following:

- Prune for safety. Remove damaged or weak branches or lower limbs that may affect pedestrian or vehicle clearance or visibility.
- Improve structure. It is easier to alter the overall appearance when the tree is dormant. The branching structure is visible and cuts can be selectively made.
 - Prune to remove crossing or rubbing branches.
 - Remove dead, damaged, or diseased branches.
 - Branches growing towards the center of the canopy should be removed to create more air space.

Crapemyrtles are a low-maintenance plant with minimal pruning with the correct variety and proper placement. Crape Murder would disappear and we would have better looking and healthier crape myrtles throughout the area.

American Mistletoe

Shannon Dietz, Harris County Extension Agent, ANR

The American or Oak Mistletoe (*Phoradendron serotinum*) is a common plant throughout the south, including Texas, and can be found growing on the branches of deciduous trees. While mistletoe can grow on more than 100 different types of trees, it is often found on pecan, hickory, oaks, red maple, and live oaks to name a few. Mistletoe is a small evergreen shrub that is semi-parasitic on most plants. Instead of producing roots in the ground, mistletoe sends out root-like structures into tree branches. Although mistletoe makes its own food, it steals water, and nutrients from its host tree.

Mistletoe is most easily seen in the winter. Look for ball-shaped green masses up to 3" wide connected to otherwise bare tree branches. Each mass in an individual plant and a single tree may only host a few or many plants. Birds are responsible for spreading the plant by seed. They love its white berries which ripen in early winter. When the bird feeds on these berries, birds leave behind seeds after going through the bird. Areas, where trees are heavily infested with mistletoe, are often indicative of healthy bird populations.

In ancient times, Celtic Druids believed that mistletoe was a holy plant because it was rooted closer to heaven than any other plant. Its evergreen leaves symbolized the promise of spring's return. In Scandinavian mythology, the mistletoe was a symbol of peace.

These traditions and beliefs were adopted by the English and the French, giving us the holiday custom of kissing under mistletoe bunches. Hanging mistletoe is a Christmas tradition in the U.S. while in Europe, it is more commonly associated with New Year's Eve.



Do not hang mistletoe directly above heaters, stoves, fireplaces, or any other heat-producing elements. These locations will dry out much faster, creating a fire hazard.

If you are considering harvesting mistletoe to bring indoors during the holiday, be sure to place it carefully. Between 1985 and 1992, U.S. Poison Control centers reported 1,754 cases of accidental poisoning of children or pets with mistletoe. Accidental ingestion of American mistletoe can be harmful, so keep the plants and decorations out of the reach of children and pets.

American Mistletoe

Continued



Because of its parasitic nature, mistletoe can weaken or destroy trees it infests, especially if the tree has been compromised by storms, pests, or old age.

Removing the mistletoe may help revive the tree. In newly developed areas or where trees are being replaced, the ideal method of controlling or somewhat prevention is to plant trees believed to be resistant or moderately resistant to mistletoe.

If there are trees on your property where mistletoe growth cannot be tolerated, you can control it by pruning out the infested branches. Simply cutting the mistletoe back flush with the branch will not kill this parasite, though it will help to control its growth and spread. Unfortunately, pruning can damage the tree's structure, making the cure worse than the problem.

Pruning trees to remove mistletoe is best done in winter by a certified arborist.

For more information on mistletoe, please click on the link below:

[**MISTLETOE - LEAFY OR TRUE MISTLETOE**](#)



Post-Holiday Plant Care

Brandi Keller, Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator



Now that the holidays are mostly over, we want to ensure the plants that we bought or that were given as gifts remain in the best health for as long as possible. We will take a look at a couple of plants here and how to best keep them in tip-top shape.

Rosemary is one of the few holiday plants that have a functional use as an herb, however, these plants are not meant to be grown indoors long-term. During the holidays, be sure to water only when dry, ensure there is proper drainage (this usually means taking it out of the decorative foil), and keep it in bright-light, near a window. After the holidays, plant outside or pot up as they are usually pot bound when bought.

Amaryllis is a popular flower that can be sold as individual bulbs or as a kit with the pot and soil included to force a bloom during the holiday season. These are striking, large blooms that can grow 18-36 inches tall. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. After the holidays, they can be planted outdoors or treated as a houseplant. If keeping indoors, trim the flower stalk and keep the leaves healthy. If planting outdoors, pick a location with plenty of sunlight after any chance of frost. Since they do not naturally bloom in the winter, expect later blooms in the spring (except for the first year).



For more information, view the lecture on Holiday Plant Care provided in November [HERE](#).

The following plants are covered:

- Amaryllis
- Rosemary topiary
- Christmas cactus
- Cyclamen
- Norfolk island pine
- Poinsettia



HomeGrown Lecture Series

Join us every other Thursday
at 10:00 a.m. CST

**JANUARY
FEBRUARY
MARCH** **2021**

- 01/07 **Pollinator Gardens**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M Agrilife County
Extension Agent-Horticulture
- 01/21 **Soil Testing**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M Agrilife County
Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources
- 02/04 **Spring Garden Prep**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener
Program Coordinator
- 02/18 **Spring Vegetable Gardening**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M Agrilife County
Extension Agent-Horticulture
- 03/04 **History of Cattle in Texas**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M Agrilife County
Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources
- 03/18 **All About Basil**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener
Program Coordinator



**TO REGISTER FOR THIS FREE
EVENT,
PLEASE VISIT**

**[HTTPS://HOMEGROWN2021Q1.
EVENTBRITE.COM/](https://homegrown2021q1.eventbrite.com/)**

**TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION**

Virtual CEU Vegetation Conference



Harris County ANR Annual Vegetation Management Conference

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

OR

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2021

9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

**DOOR PRIZES WILL BE AWARDED THROUGHOUT
THE DAY FOR EACH CONFERENCE!
MUST BE ON-LINE TO CLAIM YOUR PRIZE!**

For More Information Contact:

Julie Menn
Administrative Assistant
(713) 274-0976

julie.menn@ag.tamu.edu

**13105 Northwest Fwy
Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77040**

**Check-In Time: 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM
Classes start promptly at 9:00 AM**

***** RECEIVE 5 TDA (Ag Only) CEU CREDITS ***
(pending TDA approval)**

**Registration:
\$45.00 - "VIRTUAL ONLY"
On-Line Registration & Pre-Payment
ONLY
2021vegetativeconference.eventbrite.com**

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic formation, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service, or accommodation in order to participate in this meeting are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office prior to the meeting to determine how reasonable accommodations can be made.

Fruit Tree Sale!



Harris County Master Gardener

2021 Online Sales
Plant Sale Dates for 2021

Online Store location

HCMGA-online.company.site

Fruit Tree Sale January 23

Pick up only location (No in person shopping)
order until December 31

RICHARD & MEG WEEKLEY PARK
19110 LONGENBAUGH ROAD
CYPRESS, TX 77433

Online Sale November 1-December 31

Order at HCMGA-online.company.site

Spring Vegetable & Plant Sale March 13

Pick up only location (No in person shopping)

Online Sale begins February 3, 2021

RICHARD & MEG WEEKLEY PARK
19110 LONGENBAUGH ROAD
CYPRESS, TX 77433

Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale February 20

Pick up only location (No in person shopping)
order until January 31

CAMPBELL HALL, PASADENA FAIRGROUNDS
7601 RED BLUFF ROAD,
PASADENA, TX

Online sale November 1-January 31

Order at HCMGA-online.company.site

Peppers, Perennials, and Herbs March 20

Pick up only location (No in person shopping)

Online Sale begins February 3, 2021

New Location GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN
1210 GENOA REDBLUF ROAD
HOUSTON, TX

In response to the needs of the public we will have contactless sale events for 2021. Our sales will be 100% online/pickup only.

Ask A Master Gardener - hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/ OR 713-274-0950



Now through December 31st
Online Sale!

hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/

FRUIT TREE SALE

Harris County Master Gardeners

- Order Online
- Contact-less, driveby pickup
- Two pickup locations

Contacts/Social Media/Webistes

CONTACTS

Paul Winski, County Extension Agent - Horticulture - Paul.Winski@ag.tamu.edu
Brandi Keller, Master Gardener Program Coordinator - Brandi.keller@ag.tamu.edu
Shannon Dietz - County Extension Agent - AG/NR - Shannon.Dietz@ag.tamu.edu

Social Media/Webistes

[Harris County Horticulture Facebook](#)

[Horticulture YouTube Channel](#)

[Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook](#)

[Harris County AgriLife Website](#)

[Harris County Ag & Natural Resources
Facebook](#)

