



Lagerstroemia indica

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

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

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.



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Pianta oggi conosciutissima, è originaria della Cina dove da millenni è usata per ornare i templi. Dalla Cina, per lo stesso impiego ornamentale, passò in India dove nel 1759 fu notata da Magnus Von Lagerstroem, allora direttore della Compagnia delle Indie. Lagerstroem ne inviò alcune piantine in Europa, al grande botanico Linneo affinché le classificasse, ma non seppe mai di aver trovato un nuovo vegetale perché morì prima, e Linneo, in onore del suo scopritore, dette alla nuova pianta il nome di *Lagerstroemia indica*.

Si tratta di grandi arbusti o piccoli alberi dalle fioriture estive tra le più spettacolari e vistose, con colori che vanno dal bianco al rosso passando per tutte le tonalità del viola, in pieno fiore il fogliame quasi scompare

Fioritura

Lagerstroemia indica fiorisce alla sommità dei rami di un anno con infiorescenze a pannocchie lunghe 15/20 cm formate da numerosi fiori. Per ottenere una fioritura vigorosa su rami sempre giovani, in inverno occorre potare tutti i rami dell'anno precedente accorciandoli di almeno due terzi. Se la pianta non viene potata, assumerà un aspetto un po' disordinato e i fiori resteranno

più piccoli ma comunque sempre numerosi. Normalmente si potano più drasticamente le piante educate ad albero, mentre non si potano le piante cresciute come grandi arbusti o macchie.

Decorativa tutto l'anno

Anche al di fuori della fioritura, *Lagerstroemia* è una pianta molto elegante: in primavera ha piccole foglioline obovate di un verde tenero talvolta bronzate in alcune varietà, in autunno ha foglie che virano al giallo prima di cadere, infine in inverno i suoi tronchi presentano una scorza squamata di colore marrone-grigio con tipiche macchie a pelle di leopardo, caratteristica questa che unita all'aspetto costoluto dei vecchi tronchi, conferisce alla pianta una discreta ornamentalità anche in questa stagione.