

'Crape murder'

Crape Myrtles are one of our most beautiful and valuable small-growing trees, but beware of a local pruning technique that Southern Living magazine calls "crape murder." One of our local landscape experts describes it as "paying someone to devalue your property."

Such pruning is unnecessary. Other than removing dead or crossed limbs

and suckers on the trunk and at the base, crape myrtles should be left alone. Once large limbs are cut back, the multiple new suckers that grow produce a deformed "pom-pom" effect that ruins the beautiful, natural form of the tree.

How can a gardener rescue a tree that has been "crape murdered"?

◆ Cut them flush to the ground and let them start over. They are very tough

plants, and cut back in the winter — or now; it's not too late — they will regrow quickly.

◆ The first summer, the trees will grow multiple stems knee to hip high. Leave them like that, but remove all the flower heads as the stems will be too weak to remain upright under the weight of the flowers.

◆ The first winter, remove some of

the stems at the ground, leaving an odd number, perhaps three or five. Add a little fertilizer.

◆ The second summer, they will grow nearly shoulder high and should bloom.

◆ The third summer, they will be small, multitrunked trees with natural shape and form.

Need more information? Visit the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club Web site (www.dirtdaubers.org) and download the brochure on crape myrtles under the projects tab. Better yet, consider joining the Men's Garden Club and help continue a 60-year tradition of making Spartanburg a more beautiful community.

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