

Topic: Crape Myrtle Butchery

Question: I took this picture of a crape myrtle tree that I think is badly over-pruned. In fact, there must have been 10 or more trees at this site with the same "hair cut." I've also noticed this same degree of pruning in other places. Is this the way to prune crape myrtle, am I missing something?

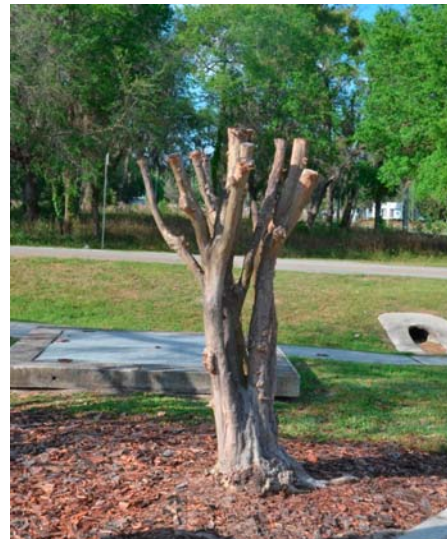
- Haley, email

Answer: This severe pruning of crape myrtles is not an uncommon practice throughout the state. It is known as 'carpe murder' by some in the industry. Crape myrtles are tough trees. The tree pictured will not die but the practice does have its consequences.

Firstly, pruning it with such gusto while in its dormant season will delay flowering for about a month and its days of flowering will be equally shortened. Secondly, this could cause unseen damage and disease to the trunks. Thirdly, in unincorporated Lee County, the practice is illegal.

. Pruning of plants stimulate new growth. Thus, new vegetative flush in the spring will have accompanying flowers. This severe pruning practice started with the old varieties of crape myrtles which were not extremely vigorous and required some pruning to generate new growth and flowers.

However, even this would have been too extreme for the old varieties. Today, the commonly planted cultivars are much more vigorous than their olden day cousins. In the spring and summer, they produce new leaves and flowers with much less assistance from the shears. Chances are very good that the tree pictured is one of the new cultivars that began making their appearance in the landscape in the mid 1970's.



Useful Links

[Small Tree Fact Sheet](#)

[Flowering Trees Fact Sheets](#)

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing brownsh@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml>. For native plants click on [Publications A-Z](#).