

Pruning Crepe Myrtles

“Topping” Crepe Myrtles has become a common practice, but a poorly advised one often called “crepe murder.”

In the fall, the crepe myrtles store energy in their roots to re-leaf the tree in the spring and blossom the tree in the summer. If the tree is topped (picture 1), then it will need to replace all of the missing branches of various sizes with numerous small twigs. When these twigs leaf out, they will overlap (picture 2) so much that they will have difficulty executing photosynthesis to make sufficient nutrition for the tree. Finally, small dense twigs are more prone to disease and pests than having a range of various sized branches.

So Topping a crepe myrtle will stress and weaken your tree because it:

- ❖ Uses up energy in rebuilding the branching system.
- ❖ Leads to less nutrition due to inefficient leafing.
- ❖ Makes the tree more susceptible to disease and pests.



Topping of a Crepe Myrtle



Leads to excessive growth of weak twigs

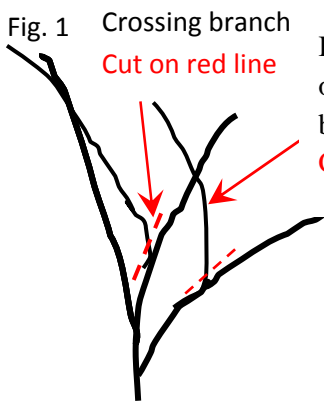
Correct pruning provides a more open and natural canopy that has a healthy branching structure. It allows sunlight and air to freely circulate through and around the plant. This improves photosynthesis and reduces the potential for fungal infections.



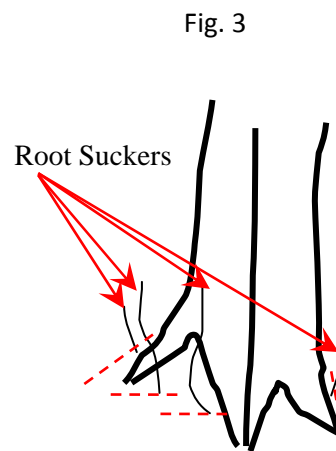
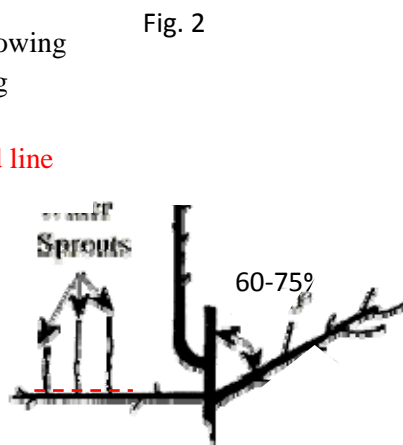
So how should we prune our crepe myrtles?

There are several easy rules to follow when pruning any tree.

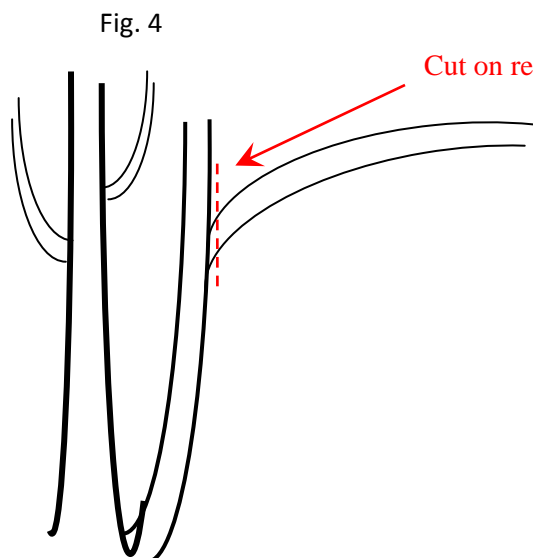
- ❖ Broken or damaged branches may be removed whenever occur.
- ❖ Most trees should be pruned or trimmed in late winter (late February or early March.)
- ❖ Use sharp well oiled tools. If pruning diseased branches or limbs, rub tools with 70% alcohol after each cut.
- ❖ Tree leaves need light and air to produce nutrients for the tree. Remove:
 1. Inward growing branches (they will lose to the competition of the taller canopy branches/stems) Fig. 1
 2. Crossing branches (remove one of the two) which are going to compete with each other. Fig. 1
 3. Crepe myrtle branches are strongest if the inter branch angle is between 60-75 degrees, this allows proper distance between branches/leaves. Fig. 2
 4. Small water sprouts or suckers that grow on major lateral branches Fig. 2 or at the base Fig. 3 need pruning.



Inward growing
or crossing
branch
Cut on red line



Additionally, crepe myrtles may be limbed up when lateral branches Fig. 4 are so low that they interfere with walks or driveways, or are just not desired upright growth. This pruning requires three cuts Fig. 5 partial cut A. to protect the branch collar from tearing as other cuts are made; partial cut B. to reduce the weight and pinching of the branch on C. the final cut which is close to the trunk but not into the **branch collar** which contains hormones to help heal the cut.



Cut on red lines

