

## *Lagerstroemia indica* (Crape Myrtle)

The Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) is a slow growing, deciduous shrub or tree 10-25 feet tall. It produces profuse and vibrant terminal groups of flowers in deep pink, soft pink, purple, lavender or white. Each flower is about 1.5 inches in diameter and possesses 6 distinctly clawed petals that are crinkled and ruffled, resembling crepe paper. The tree has opposite, simple leaves that are lustrous and green in the spring and summer but turn conspicuously red, bronze or gold in the late fall. Crape Myrtles have very smooth bark that varies in color from gray, fawn to taupe and which is evident after the leaves are shed in the winter. These characteristics, which vary according to the season, make this small tree attractive all year round.

The specific epithet (*indica*) indicatea that *Lagerstroemia indica* comes from India, where it is extensively cultivated. However, it is now thought that it actually originated in China. The renown British plant explorer, Ernest Henry Wilson made four extensive collecting trips to Western China between 1899 and 1910 and described both wild and cultivated specimens in his memoirs. In a temple garden in the plain of Chengtu, he described "Two magnificent specimens of the Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) trained into the shape of a fan some 25 ft high by 12 feet wide, and said to be over 200 years old, are finer than anything of the kind I have seen elsewhere."

Crape Myrtles tolerate heat, some cold and a variety of soil types. They grow best in hot, dry climates and full sun. No special feeding is necessary and infrequent, deep watering is recommended. Crape Myrtles tend to develop powdery mildew in coastal regions. They are common on Victoria Avenue and can be seen from Myrtle to Lincoln,

Horace to Jane, Monroe to Irving and Myers to John in the median. They are present on parkways and in the Hal Snyder and Dr. Lewis Gardens as well.

