



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

SUNLIGHT REQUIREMENTS OF CRAPE MYRTLES

By Laurie Meyerpeter, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I bought a red crape myrtle two years ago and this year when it bloomed the blossoms aren't red, they're deep pink. I wanted the red variety that I see planted in my neighborhood. Did I get the wrong variety? Was it mislabeled? Or did I do something wrong?

A There are several new red crape myrtles on the market. Previously "red" crape myrtles were a deep, deep magenta-red. In recent years several true red crape myrtles have been introduced. Two widely available varieties include the hugely popular 'Dynamite' and the newer 'Red Rocket.' 'Dynamite' has bronzy red foliage, gorgeous fire engine red blossoms, and turns orange-red in the fall. It has a stiff upright shape when young and seems to have a slightly slower growth rate than other crape myrtles. 'Red Rocket' has cherry red blossoms, good fall color, and an upright rounded shape. It appears to be slightly more vigorous than 'Dynamite' as well as being a repeat bloomer. It is likely that 'Dynamite' is the tree that you saw, or if it is a young tree, 'Red Rocket'.

The main cause of red crape myrtles with pink blossoms instead of red flowers is insufficient sunlight as the buds are developing. Crape myrtles like full sun and strong sunshine is even more crucial for the red cultivars. A second but related cause is overcast or cloudy days during blossom development. In 2008, many red crape myrtles produced pinkish-red blossoms in this area because of the heavy smoke pall caused by the many fires of that year at a critical stage in blossom development. In addition to pink blossoms, red crape myrtles will sometimes produce white petals. These are also caused by not enough sun. Although the resulting blossoms can be quite attractive with red, pink, and white flecked flowers, this is not desirable and reflects a lack of sufficient light.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: ceplacer@ucdavis.edu

The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State law and University policy, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, medical condition (cancer-related), ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, California 94607-5200. (510) 987-0096. United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, Placer & Nevada Counties cooperating.

NEVADA COUNTY

255 So Auburn
Grass Valley, CA 95945
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: cenevada@ucdavis.edu