

City of Plantation Landscape Architecture presents ...

Plant of the Quarter

Lagerstroemia speciosa/Queen Crepe Myrtle

Time flies so I must be having lots of fun! We are having so much fun in the Department of Landscape Architecture that the months and the seasons appear and disappear like flash cards. The good part is... I have the best job in the City. To imagine where trees and plants could be, plan and design for them on paper, install them and watch them grow. It is truly art in the fifth dimension...Time.

This quarter we will look at another showstopper for the Summer. The Queen Crepe Myrtle, or botanically known as *Lagerstroemia speciosa*, is a super yard tree. Its medium size, character and showy flower bloom makes it functional, care free and memorable. It is native to India and the East Indies and will require our Tropical South Florida weather to thrive. That being said, the Queen Crepe Myrtle, like its cousin the more familiar Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) will go deciduous (lose its leaves) with the first cold snap. Factor this into your design plan. Unlike some species that actually look attractive bare, I find this one to be somewhat unappealing during its winter nakedness.

A brief summary of this species:

Habit/Height/Spread Although the plant books state that this tree can reach a height of 60 feet x 40 feet it is more typical to find it in the range of 30 to 35'. It has an unusual broad yet rounded growth habit with a dense head (with open spots) and coarse texture, not resembling its cousin at all. It looks like a dense bush on a stick!

Foliage/Flowers/Fruit In this case, the foliage really is what gives this tree its character. The leaves are large, oblong to ovate, and up to 12" long with a rough, quilted texture. Keep it well fertilized to maintain a deep green color. In the cold weather, the leaves will turn red before they fall. We call this 'winter interest'. The flowers are the reason for the season, however! Their spectacular 3" wide pink/purple papery blossoms are borne on large clusters on the tips of long branches (also called terminal panicles). Once you have seen the blooms, you remember where each tree is and patiently wait for the next summer show. Mother Nature completes the flowering cycle with a 1" round woody capsule that splits open to disperse its seeds.

Bark/ Branching Unlike its cousin, the bark does not peel or have unusual characteristics. The branching however, is worth noting since there are many long, thin branches that give it a bush like look. When the branches become long they take on a horizontal position. This is especially true with the weight of the bloom.

Problems Each plant book I consulted pointed out scale insects, aphids and sooty mold as culprits. Since we are having problems in the city with lac scale and sooty mold we may have to look this species over carefully for similar problems.

Recommendations Site your Queen Crepe Myrtle in full sun or in no more than some broken shade from much higher trees that are close by. It is not soil specific but does require well-drained soil and will greatly benefit from a good slow release fertilizer with minors applied twice a year, mid - March and July. You can find this tree planted along East Tropical Way and Fig Tree Lane and on the City Hall campus as our most recent Arbor Day addition.

Purchasing and Planting This may be tough. It will be hard to find and will be small in size. Call around and keep asking. Nurserymen are encouraged to grow species that people want to buy. Don't be tempted, however, if it demonstrates poor branch structure or girdled roots (roots that encircle the roots and run around the edge of the container). Keep looking. Look for a straight trunk with a single trunk and evenly spaced branches around the whole tree. Always plant to expose the root flare and create a raised ring (several feet from the trunk to retain the extra water you will be giving until it is established). Apply only 2-3 inches of mulch to retain the extra water and to discourage weed growth and that nasty string trimmer that loves to bite into its tender bark. (Don't let the mulch touch the sacred bark either. Let it breath and discourage ants from nesting there.)

Good Luck and Happy Botanizing!