

“Ask The Plant Groom”™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

For: QA1032

I see lots of beautiful crape myrtles in bloom and would like to know if now is an OK time to plant them? – N. G.

They are nice aren't they? They are super blooming shrubs for Texas!!!

Container grown crape myrtles may be successful planted now. The best time to plant is during Oct. –Nov.

A couple of thoughts/suggestions for you.

- Decide which color(s) you prefer while the plants are in bloom.
- Visit local retail nurseries to secure the named varieties or cultivars you wish to plant and record this on paper. Additional locations I suggest visiting include Botanical Gardens, Arboretums and other public facilities including parks. Look for labels that name crape myrtles and jot the ones you like down.
- Create a planting plan yourself or work with a professional with the installation to be done this fall.
- Some varieties of crape myrtles under less than ideal conditions could have issues with powdery mildew. One way to help prevent this from occurring is ask for, purchase and only plant powdery mildew resistant cultivars.
- Remember. Crape myrtles are similar to us in one way ... they come in all heights and widths. So, if you want a red variety to only be 6' tall then purchase a variety that only reaches this height. Please DO NOT buy and plant a tall growing variety such a 'Natchez' and keep it “whacked” back to 6'. This practice is crape myrtle butchering at its' finest. Just don't be a part of this activity.

I have nursed a poinsettia we had last year and would like to know what needs to be done to get the red color for this year. Thank you. – E. G.

Around Sept. 1st provide 14 hours of total darkness and 8 hours of full sun each day until color begins to show. After color begins to show they are ready for display.

Water as needed during this time as should be done throughout the year. A complete and balanced water soluble if often used in growing poinsettias such as 20-20-20. If you prefer another analysis do follow label directions as when utilizing any garden aid including fertilizers.

Is one bark mulch better than another? I hear some folks saying we should only use one type. – F. B.

No mulch is good if it's not used including bark. The best mulch? It's the one you use.

Apply bark mulches 3 – 4" deep and add approximately 1" annually to maintain this depth. Bark mulches decompose or break down at the soil line, which is a positive activity at approximately 1" per year in Texas. Adding replacement mulch at 1" per year will maintain the recommended depth.

Quality mulching benefits occur with all types of bark mulch. Use the type(s) you prefer.

We have some tall growing nandinas that are skinny. Is it OK to cut them back? – S. R.

Nandina domestica our old stand by and long used shrub in Texas could become skinny or leggy. Pruning selected trunks back is the standard method of regrowing these tough babies.

Here's the recommendation.

- Count the total number of stems each individual plant has and make a note of this.
- Cut approximately 1/3 of the stems back to the approximate height new branching and growth is desired.
- After new growth has filled in cut 1/3 of the remaining stems back and allow them to resprout and fill in
- Lastly, cut the remaining 1/3 stems back

This technique allows the plant to always have some foliage working for the root system and regrow more effectively.

Yes, they may be cut now but I'd only cut 1/3. The best time to start a project like this is late winter – early spring.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist -Dallas County, Author, Columnist, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom™. Send your lawn, garden, plant and landscape questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net.

Copyright 2005 by Groom Media and all rights are reserved.

