



The Garden Path

The path to an environmentally sound and beautiful landscape

Goodness is easier to recognize than to define. W.H.Auden

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Stop the Cruel Crape Myrtle Cuts

By Tony Avent, *Guest Columnist*



BEFORE



AFTER

Why has the intentional butchering and beheading of trees, particularly crape myrtles, become the accepted norm? It would be bad enough if this happened once to a tree, but this bizarre ritual has become an annual rite of spring for a growing number.

What drives seemingly logical people to this unspeakable act? Have they been cooped up too long during the winter? Or perhaps they've gone off their meds and have this insane need to butcher something alive?

It could be an offshoot (pardon the pun) of the old sales technique used by unscrupulous tree-pruning firm to convince homeowners their trees would fall in a storm and crush their homes unless they were regularly topped. I hope most folks now know this butchering actually makes the tree weaker and more susceptible to disease. (Someone needs to tell these folks, too, that an uprooted crape myrtle couldn't even take out a decent-size doghouse.)

Then there is the myth about crape myrtles flowering better if you behead them. It doesn't work well for people, and it doesn't work any better for crape myrtles. Imagine those ancient unpruned specimens that seem to bloom just fine or, better yet, those crape myrtles in the wild, sure longing for a pruning job so they can flower and reproduce. I always like the line about getting rid of the unsightly seed pods. But how would you feel if someone cut off your reproductive organs for appearance's sake?

Maybe if your crape myrtle's been sneaking around at night with a maple, fine. But if not, what's your excuse?

I've studied the varying magnitude of cuts, from simply removing the old seed heads to trunk cuts into wood with a 4-inch diameter. Everyone has a different excuse for this ritual. The depth of the cut appears directly proportioned to the testosterone level of the mutilator and horsepower of the power equipment. I'm guessing some folks just loathe natural beauty. They just can't leave it alone. Local governments have banned most other things of use or entertainment value – surely pruning implements can't be too hard to license. I'm proposing criminal legislation for intentional butchering of trees, in particular crape myrtles. It should be considered a capital offense, with the following sentencing guidelines:

-- **First Degree Crape Murder "Texas Chainsaw Cut"** (premeditated felony):

Cuts on trunks greater than 4 inches in diameter.

Sentence: Life sentence chained to an unpruned crape myrtle, watching constant reruns of the "Anna Nicole" show.

-- **First Degree Crape Murder "al-Qaida Beheading Cut"** (premeditated felony):

Cuts on trunks between 2 and 4 inches in diameter. Sentence: 20 years of watching Nancy Grace on CNN. All pruning privileges permanently revoked.

-- **Second Degree Crape Murder "Limbada, the Forbidden Cut"** (premeditated felony): Cuts on trunks between 1 and 2 inches in diameter. Sentence: 10 years of listening to Dick Vitale announcing basketball games – with the sound turned up. All Pruning privileges permanently revoked.

-- **Third Degree Crape Murder "Lorena Bobbitt Cut"** (premeditated felony):

Cuts on limb tips between a quarter of an inch and 1 inch in diameter. Sentence: Surrender all pruning implements for 24 months, Take a 12-step anger management course and write a five-page essay on the book "Trees are People, Too." (If cuts are made on male trees only, the sentence is doubled according to the hate crimes statutes.)

-- **Involuntary Tree Slaughter Spastic Surgery** (premeditated misdemeanor): Topping limbs less than a quarter-inch in diameter. This charge is reserved for neighbors who decide on a spur of the moment to copy their neighbors to not be viewed as outcasts. Sentence: Surrender of Felco Pruners for six months, suspension of all pruning privileges for one year, and completion of Pruning 101.

If you're ready to become rehabilitated, drop your pruners, put hands in the air and slowly back away. This spring, the willowy new growth that emerges from your crape myrtle will still flower and, thank goodness, the leaves and flowers will mask much of the past mutilation. The worst problem you're likely to have this summer is that the weak branch angles combined with the size of the flower heads will make the new growth much more likely to break in a strong wind.

Beware: Once the leaves drop in the fall, you must stare again at the scars and damage from the previous years' cuts. It's going to take two to three years for the new growth to lengthen enough to replace the beheaded tops.

ROSE TIPS FOR THE MONTH

By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

July is a month of continued maintenance for the Rose Gardener. Spray or dust with carbaryl to keep the Japanese Beetles under control. It is also important to continue with your weekly spray routine for black spot and powdery mildew. Prevention is the best way to combat these fungus diseases. Deadheading is also important as roses will continue to set new shoots and will produce an abundance of blooms if well cared for. Watering and the application of liquid fertilizer are very important during these very hot days to keep your roses hydrated and nourished.

It is not too late to cut a rose back to about 2 feet if you are having difficulty controlling disease. It will have plenty of time to reestablish grow before entering dormancy as a strong plant. Sometimes it is the best way to rid your plant of disease problems, giving it a fresh start, and preventing it from spreading diseases to surrounding plants.



Debbie Roos photo

BENEFICIALS!!

By Cynthia Dickinson, Master Gardener, Warren County

Lady beetles are oval, almost hemispherical insects that are often shiny and contrastingly colored. Many species are red with black spots or black with red spots.

The eggs of some lady beetles are yellow and less than 1/16 inch long. They are often laid on end in small masses. The eggs of others are scale-like and flat on the twigs of the plants. From the eggs hatch larvae, small insects that resemble tiny, short-snouted "alligators" with six legs. Some lady beetles have larvae covered with a fluffy white secretion which makes the insect look like a mealy bug. The next stage is the pupa.

Pupae are about the size of the adults, but the legs and antennae are closely pressed to the body.

Because [lady beetle pupae](#) do not resemble the adults (or anything else in the home gardener's experience) the many gardeners assume that lady beetle pupae are pests "sucking the life" out of the plant. Consequently, these pupae are squashed or scraped off and destroyed. Each lady beetle larva eats many aphids and other pests, and each lady beetle lays many eggs which would hatch into many more larvae. Each pupa destroyed allows thousands of aphids to survive.

Lady beetles are found throughout the United States. Except for the Mexican bean beetle and the squash beetle, all other American species of lady beetles feed on aphids, scale insects, mealy bugs, spider mites, and other harmful plant pests and do not damage plants.

Also called ladybirds and ladybugs, lady beetles are regarded with more popular affection than any other beetles. Eggs are laid near aphids, scale insects, or spider mites. After hatching, the tiny lady beetle larvae feed on nearby plant pests. The larvae molt several times as they grow. Finally, the last stage larva fastens itself by the rear end to a leaf or twig and then pupates. The pupae develop for several days. New lady beetles then emerge from the pupal stages.

In the fall, adult lady beetles seek a dry, sheltered overwintering site. The following spring the lady beetles disperse to find plant pests for food and oviposition (egg laying) sites. In North Carolina, lady beetles overwinter in small groups (rarely more than 300 to 400 individuals).

For the average home gardener, we generally don't suggest purchasing lady beetles for insect control. Some shipments of ladybeetles have also been found to be already parasitized and may have a short life and no reproductive capacity, especially when they come from field-collected populations

JUNE TO DO !

Landscaping & Lawn Care

By Onda Marable, Master Gardener, Vance County

- Deadhead annuals and perennials. Replace worn out annuals.
- Pinch back annuals, especially petunias and salvias, to encourage bushier plants
- Fertilize annuals
- Watch for insect or bacterial/fungal damage. Easier to treat if caught early.
- This is Japanese beetle month. Knock off into soapy water in the mornings while they are wet with dew. Only resort to chemicals if you are really infested
- Irrigate regularly to avoid drought stress to your plants
- Fall blooming chrysanthemums should be cut back before July 15

Fruits and Veggies

By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener, Vance County

- If rain does not fall, you need to provide one inch of water per week to keep the garden growing well. Use of mulch will help conserve moisture. Use of soaker hoses or drip irrigation keep foliage dry and help reduce disease.
- There is still time for a last planting of many warm season vegetables.
- Continue spray program on fruits if needed. Observe time period needed between the last spray and harvest. **Read the label.**
- As crops mature, compost or till in plant material that is not diseased. Diseased material should be discarded in the trash.
- If you are considering a fall garden, see the [July 2007](#) issue of this newsletter

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PLANT OF THE MONTH

By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

Southern Star (Tweedia caerulea, syn. Oxypetalum caeruleum)



The main reason to have this perennial is for the stunning color of its flowers – an unbelievable shade of sky blue. They're about an inch across and are borne in clusters in the upper leaf axils. Since it has a rather sprawling habit, early pinching helps to force branching. Its height is around 24" and width about 9".

The leaves have short petioles and are oblong to lance shaped, heart-shaped at the base. This is a plant for full sun, average soil and needs good drainage. I checked two references for culture, and one classed it a hardiness Zone 10 plant, the other gave minimum temperature tolerance of 39 degrees F. However, it is perennial in my garden, and in Tony Avent's catalog listing for the pink one, he lists Zone 7b. It looks especially good with the ornamental grass Little Bluestem.



INTERESTING TIDBITS

By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

Duke Gardens has a special treat from mid June through the end of August: A water lily competition, so get your cameras ready. New hybrids from around the world, both hardy and tropical, will be judged, and the winner will be announced in late July. The winner's title will be Best New Waterlily of 2008. Look for them in the Virtue Peace Pond behind the Doris Duke Center.

Head over to the JC Raulston Arboretum for the July 8 plants man's tour of great native plants, both "old" and new that make great landscape plants. Lead by assistant director Mark Weathington

For a great splash of color and a dramatic form plus drought tolerance, try 'Color Guard' (*Yucca filamentosa*). And you won't get stuck by stiff, prickly leaves since this cultivar has soft-bladed, pliable gold and green leaves. This and the tidbits above were gleaned from the Aug. 2008 issue of "Carolina Gardener."


Can't find information on a plant you saw? Try <http://plantinfo.umn.edu> it's free from the Andersen Horticultural Library of the University of Minnesota. Its database contains more than 100,000 cultivated plants with over 2,000 sources and 250,000 references to images of plants. From "The Avant Gardener," Vol. 40, No. 9, July '08.

Some perennial seeds you can direct seed now or sow into pots for transplanting are: butterfly weed, purple coneflower, Shasta daisy and salvias.

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