



Arkansas County
Cooperative Extension Service

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HORTICULTURE NEWS



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In this issue:

- *Master Gardener Trg
- * Pruning Crape Myrtles
- *Spurweed Control in Lawns
- *Black Bean & Corn Salsa

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Our county agents and staff are continuing to serve the public by answering calls and accepting soil samples, etc., but we have limited entry to our offices in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Please use the contact information on this page to reach us!

On-Line Training Offered for Master Gardeners

The Master Gardener Program is one of the many educational programs offered through the UA Cooperative Extension Service. As you are aware, due to the Covid-19 pandemic we have made adjustments to our programs to meet the needs of our clients. For those interested in becoming a Master Gardener we are currently offering an on-line training option. This training can be completed through a self-paced curriculum.

What does it mean to be a Master Gardener?

As horticultural trained volunteers, Master Gardeners extend research-based information through demonstration and educational programs using horticulture best practices, strengthening communities and families throughout Arkansas.

How much time is involved?

After completing your 40-hour horticulture training, you are required to volunteer 40 working hours and 20 learning hours back to your county program during your first year. In your subsequent years, you will provide only 20 working hours and 20 learning hours to remain actively certified.

What are the benefits?

It is often said that the Master Gardener Program is more than 'just a horticulture class'—and it is. As a Master Gardener you are afforded many of the resources of the University of Arkansas and receive training that will benefit you for a lifetime. This training will

cover the basics of the Master Gardener program and Extension, botany, soil science, plant propagation, pest management, pesticide and herbicide usage, vegetables, herbs, fruit trees and ornamental plants, perennials, annuals, landscape basics and turf grasses, plant and weed identification, pruning, bees, and other horticulture related subjects.

The Master Gardener training fee \$75. The self-paced on-line training will open up on **March 1** and will be available until **May 15** for participants to complete the training. **Pre-Registration should be completed by February 10** through the Arkansas County Extension Service to allow time for the participants to receive the training materials needed and be provided information for logging into the training.

If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener, contact the Arkansas County Extension Office at 870-946-3231 or 870-673-2346. You can also email Arkansas-dewitt@uaex.edu or contact Phil Horton at 870-830-1624 for an application or additional information.



DON'T BE GUILTY OF CRAPE MYRTLE MURDER!



Crape Myrtles are probably the most incorrectly pruned plants we grow, with "crape murder" being the norm, versus the exception. Crape murder . . . rape of the crapes. . . butchering—call it what you like, but there are serial homicidal pruners of crape myrtles out there, and the trend continues despite the best efforts of horticulturists across the south. Standard crape myrtles have the potential to be wonderful small trees, if they aren't chopped to their knees annually.

Crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia sps*) are a true southern favorite. Native to China and Korea the plant is grown from zones 6 to 10—in the more northern ranges it tends to die back to the ground annually. Few plants can compete with this vibrant flowering plant for summer color, given freely with very little care. They thrive in heat and humidity and are drought tolerant to boot, so are a common landscape plant in the southern landscape. Thousands of varieties are available, and the plants mature height run the gamut, from almost groundcover forms, to dwarfs, miniatures, up to standards. New cultivars appear annually. Knowing what mature height you are seeking BEFORE planting, can help in choosing the variety you buy. If space is limited, opt for one of the smaller growing forms, which can be sheared back annually. If you have chosen a standard variety, let it mature and become the statuesque beauty it was bred to be!

Crape myrtle trees bloom on the new growth, so any pruning that is needed should be done prior to new growth beginning—for most of the south, this will be from mid-February through mid-March. Crape myrtles are often one of the last plants to begin growing in the garden, waiting on warmer temperatures; so don't worry if February is slipping away on you. While some gardeners begin pruning in the fall after the leaves have fallen, avoid this for two reasons. One, you have a pruned look all winter long, which is less natural looking and less appealing in the landscape; and secondly, if you live in the upper south, extra growth is an added buffer for any potential winter damage, which can then be pruned off in February. Well-established and well-structured plants may not need annual pruning. Doing a good job of pruning while the trees are young, will build in the structure and form you need, and require less care when the trees are older.

For most standard crape myrtles, choose three, five or seven main trunks. Odd numbers give you a more desirable mature form than even—which often line up like soldiers in formation. My preference is to choose three or five. You don't want too many canes or eventually things are going to get pretty crowded as the canes (trunks) mature. Choose canes that have ample space to grow and are growing as straight and strong as possible. Prune out any additional canes or suckers as close to the soil line as possible. Suckering is one common complaint of crape myrtle growers, and again, depending on variety, may be a fact of life. Cut the suckers off as they appear. If allowed to grow-- they will, and soon you will have a mess of trunks. These suckers do compete for nutrients, water and sunlight, so remove them. Don't use herbicides to keep them controlled; they are attached to the mother plant in most cases, and weed killers could do damage to your plant.

Normally branching should begin six to eight feet off the ground. This can be lower if the plants are in a flower bed and you don't need to walk under them or view oncoming traffic at roadside. Again, we want the upper branches to spread in different directions. Make pruning cuts slightly above a bud that is facing the direction you want your new branch to grow. Avoid limbs which cross back through the plant or rub against each other. Wind movement and growth can cause these branches to wound each other, and you will eventually lose one or both.

Prune to stronger canes—remove any growth smaller than a pencil in diameter. Leaving wood that small will result in weak new growth which will have a difficult time supporting any flowers. Open the plant up by removing excess branches on the interior of the plant. This will allow better air circulation and sunlight penetration and can reduce disease problems. One of the biggest problems with crape myrtles can be the disease called powdery mildew. Many of the newer cultivars are resistant to this disease, but if you have a variety that is susceptible, keeping the plant more open in the center can cut down on disease problems.

Correct pruning will create a graceful tree-formed plant. The plant should begin flowering earlier, and have more flowers that are held upright on their branches. Allowing too many canes or cutting the plants back too short will leave you with a bushy shrub which is later in blooming. Powdery mildew is always more of an issue with less all the densely packed foliage. Keeping them sheared also prevents the trunks from maturing. Many varieties have outstanding peeling and colored bark when mature. Ranging in shades of tans and grays to copper or cinnamon, larger trunks begin to shed outer bark exposing the beautiful shades beneath. This "coming of age" for your crape myrtles can give as much color and interest in the winter landscape as the flowers do in the summer. Sheared plants are never allowed to show this interest.



Luckily for crape myrtles, the plants are resilient, and can tolerate the annual topping or shearing that some folks insist on giving. For those who have finally come around to the correct way to prune, reversing the damage done from years of shearing and large knobby growths will take time, but eventually the damage can be corrected.

If you are starting from scratch with a new standard crape myrtle, choose a bright, sunny location for your new plant, and begin pruning in February. If left unpruned, the plant may resemble a telephone

pole, all tall upright growth. Once you have the structure in place—arching branches, spreading in different directions, your job is almost complete. As with any plant, occasional maintenance is needed.

Pruning Tip: In general, plants that bloom in the spring should be pruned immediately following blooming and plants that bloom in the summer should be pruned before growth begins in late February.

Request a copy of the publication “Pruning Ornamental Shrubs” (FSA6148) from the Extension Office for additional information on pruning. You can also follow this link to watch a demonstration of proper crape myrtle pruning:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hZJRWkRH5M>



SPURWEED CONTROL FOR LAWNS

Spurweed can be easily controlled during the winter months of December, January, and February.

Spurweed, also known as stickers or burweed, is a winter annual weed. It is a tiny plant with parsley-like leaves and grows close to the soil line. Proper identification is important, so give us a call at the Extension Office if you are in doubt. Spurweed germinates in the fall and winter months in lawn and turf areas, particularly in areas where turf is thin or patchy. During the winter, it remains small and low-growing where it usually goes unnoticed until the plant matures.

In late winter, spurweed blooms are tiny white flowers. In the spring when temperatures begin to increase, the pollinated flowers begin to set fruit. The fruiting structures appear as small rosette buttons and develop in the leaf axils. As the fruit matures in mid to late spring, the seed in the fruiting structures develop spines, and when the fruit becomes dry, the spines become very sharp. These sharp spines are what make the lawn spurweed so undesirable. As you walk across a turf area barefoot, more than likely you will notice any encounter with this weed, due to the painful spines that penetrate in the skin.

How can I control spurweed? You can prevent spurweed by maintaining a healthy turf. A healthy turf competes for water, nutrients, and space. Fertility, irrigation, and mowing height can encourage a healthy turf that acts as a physical barrier, choking out many opportunistic weeds. If your managed turf site is a warm-season grass (like bermudagrass or zoysiagrass), it may be helpful to adjust your mower to its highest cutting height for the last cut of the season in fall, to ensure the thickest canopy is present over winter. This can prevent many winter annual weeds from developing. **However, if spurweed is already present, it is critical to control before the fruiting structures develop, Otherwise, the burrs will persist as hazards in your turf and shed seeds to re-infest your property next year.**

Spurweed can be easily controlled during the winter months of December, January, and February. This is the ideal time to apply herbicides for spurweed control, especially because warm-season turf species are dormant and not sensitive to many herbicide applications. In most areas of Arkansas, the weed can also be effectively controlled in March.

What herbicides should I use for spurweed control?

Preemergence herbicides that are effective on controlling spurweed are:

- atrazine (AAtrex, a Restricted Use Herbicide)
- simazine (Princep, others)
- isoxaben (Gallery)
- metribuzin (Sencor Turf)

This group of herbicides **should not** be used on bermudagrass over seeded with a cool-season turfgrass or on tall fescue, as they are injurious to cool-season turfgrasses. Note that isoxaben is effective for suppression of germinating spurweed seeds, so its application must be timed prior to germination in the Fall.

The best option to control spurweed by homeowners is a post-emergence application of one of the various two and three-way mixes of 2,4-D, dicamba and MCPP. Trimec is one of the most common trade names in this category. These products can be used on tall fescue, fall over seeded bermudagrass in which the over seeded cool-season grass has been mowed four to five times and non-over seeded bermudagrass.

How to apply herbicides for spurweed: The postemergence herbicides should be applied on a warm (air temperatures at least 55 degrees Fahrenheit), sunny day. Two to three weeks after the initial application, spurweed control should be evaluated. If control is not acceptable, an additional application may be necessary. Make sure to read the label before application to make sure the specific formulation and percentage of chemical that you choose is appropriate for your lawn and always follow mixing and sprayer instructions to insure effective control and proper use of the herbicide.

The reference to brand names in this article is not an endorsement of these products, as the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research & Extension does not endorse specific pesticide brands.

Black Bean and Corn Salsa

This dip is super-easy to make, tastes great and is nutritious.

- 1 (16 oz.) jar salsa
- 1 (15.5 oz.) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15.5 oz.) can corn kernels, drained or 1 ½ cup frozen
- 1 (14.4 oz.) can chopped tomatoes, drained
- 2 Tablespoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro or 1 teaspoon dried
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin



Combine all ingredients in a medium-size bowl. Cover and chill for 30 minutes before serving. Serve with multigrain chips or as a vegetarian side dish.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 30 Calories, Total Fat 0g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Protein 1 g, Total Carbohydrate 6 g, Dietary Fiber 2 g, Sodium 240 mg.