

THE CHANGING WORLD OF CRAPEMYRTLE

DAVID BYERS

Byers Nursery Co., Inc.
6001 Moores Mill Road
Huntsville, Alabama 35811

Wonderful work to change the world of *Lagerstroemia* is being carried out at the U. S. National Arboretum, Washington D. C., by Dr. Donald Egolf. His effort, begun in the 1960's is coming into fruition with the introduction of new and exciting choices featuring beautiful flowers, handsome exfoliating bark, many different habits of growth, and badly needed disease resistance.

Byers Nursery Company has been involved with this work since the 1950s, before the first four selections were distributed to the industry. The comments I make today are my own opinion and the result of 30 years of observations and conversations, not the result of carefully designed, scholarly experimentation.

The new selections I am discussing today are all *Lagerstroemia indica* × *fauriei* hybrids. These crosses were made possible when Dr. John Creech of the National Arboretum staff found wild specimens of *Lagerstroemia fauriei* in the mountains of Japan in 1957 and brought home the potential for many new and varied hybrids.

'Muskogee' and 'Natchez' were the first of these to be named and released in the late 1970s. They were followed by 'Tuscarora' and, then in 1986, 'Tuskegee', 'Acoma', 'Hopi', 'Pecos', and 'Zuni'. Nine more were released in 1987. They were 'Biloxi', 'Miami', 'Wichita', 'Apalachee', 'Comanche', 'Lipan', 'Osage', 'Sioux', and 'Yuma'. Three more will be released soon.

Here are my favorites, listed by heights:

5 to 10 feet

'Hopi' has medium pink flowers and a semi-dwarf, densely branched compact form with orange-red fall foliage color. It is very hardy, surviving -20 °F without damage in Washington, D. C.

'Pecos' blooms are clear medium-pink with bright yellow stamens for about 100 days. It is a globe-shaped tree with fine, dark brown bark.

10 to 15 feet

'Acoma' has a different spreading habit with many clear white flowers. This excellent crapemyrtle has purplish-red fall color.

'Apalachee' is a strong favorite of Dr. Egolf's, with light lavender blooms and excellent foliage. The fall color is orange and red with the older bark showing a cinnamon-brown color.

'Comanche' holds its coral pink, 6 to 8 in. flowers very upright following the erect growth pattern.

'Lipan' is an exceptional crapemyrtle. It is very hardy with light lavender flowers and white exfoliating bark, comparable to sycamore. It grows to be tall and spreading.

'Osage' flowers with many soft clear pink blooms and, because of its loosely open habit, sometimes weeps due to the weight of the flowers. This graceful specimen has a good late color effect, often blooming for about 100 days

'Sioux' is a plant for those who insist on many showy flowers. It often has six or eight baseball-size, true pink blooms on a stem for about 110 days and has a strong densely upright structure with dark foliage. It is an excellent plant with attractive bark.

'Tuskegee' is very hardy with excellent mildew resistance. It puts on a show with dark pink to almost red flowers for nearly 100 days. It has a distinctive horizontal branching habit and mottled light gray defoliating bark.

'Yuma' has light lavender, fading to white, softball-size flowers, many on a stem with the petals so tightly fitted that they appear to be double. Other features of this fine selection are high mildew resistance, hardiness, pretty bark, and a long, late blooming period.

16 to 30 feet

'Biloxi' is vase-shaped with outward-arching branches and has light pink flowers. The bark is an outstanding dark-brown, mottled color and the plant seems as vigorous as 'Natchez'.

'Miami' will probably be one of the best. Pink to dark-pink flowers for about 110 days, lush dark green foliage with good winter hardiness, and high mildew resistance assure this crapemyrtle's success. It has elegant chestnut-brown bark and an upright growth habit.

'Natchez' is the most widely known of this group today. Its vigor, white flowers, and beautiful cinnamon bark have been highly praised throughout the South. A specimen in the National Arboretum nears 30 ft.

But the best is yet to come. New hybrids are in the pipeline, some involving *Lagerstroemia subcostata* and *Lagerstroemia limii*. No plant in our nurseries and gardens of today can give us all the things that crapemyrtle can. It gives us tall trees to very dwarf compact forms, breathtaking flowers from red to white, and pink and lavender, magnificent exfoliating barks in many colors and wonderful showy fall foliage colors.

REFERENCES

- 1 Egolf, D. R. and A O Andrick. 1978 *The Lagerstroemia Handbook/Checklist, A Guide to Crapemyrtle Cultivars* American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta, Inc
- 2 Conversations with Dr Donald R Egolf. U S National Arboretum Washington, D. C
- 3 Byers Nursery Company, Inc 1987 *Crapemyrtle Comparisons Chart* Alabama: Golden Rule Printing.
- 4 Byers, David 1983 Selection and propagation of crapemyrtle. *Proc Inter Plant Prop Soc.* 33 542-545

BRUCE BRIGGS: Are any of these crapemyrtle suitable for growing in the Pacific Northwest?

DAVID BYERS: They can be grown but bloom is poor. There are really no good ones for that area.

WILLIAM WELCH: What do you do about seeds and seed formation?

DAVID BYERS: We do not want much seed formation because when seed are allowed to form, the total bloom is reduced. Characteristics of seedling plants are, of course, influenced by crossing, and are undesirable unless you are interested in breeding crapemyrtle.

MILTON SCHAEFER: What about hardiness?

DAVID BYERS: These plants are in general hardy to zone 5 or 6. They are being tested at both the U. S. National Arboretum in Washington, D. C., and at the Chicago Botanical Garden.