Add Sizzle to Your Landscape with New Red Crape Myrtles

Just look around and you can see that crape myrtle is among the favorite local landscape plants. It is valued as a landscape plant for its prolific summer flowers, heat and drought tolerance, and year-round landscape interest. Through intensive breeding, crape myrtles now come in a variety of sizes and flower colors. Color ranges include shades of purple, lavender, white, pink and now a "true" red, a relatively recent development.

Gardeners have long sought a crape myrtle with red flowers, but true red flowers have been hard to find. The first truly red crape myrtle was named Dynamite®. Because of its popularity, it inspired searches for more red flowering crape myrtles. Thanks to the work of Dr. Carl Whitcomb and the U.S. National Arboretum, new introductions of red flowering crape myrtle are now available. In addition to these new releases, a few older selections are worth taking a look at also.

If you have a sunny spot that needs some color but the space is not big enough for a full size crape myrtle, take a look at the dwarf and semi-dwarf forms. Dwarf cultivars are those that generally grow less than four feet tall after five years. Dwarfs were first developed in the 1960s but for some reason are not widely planted. These smaller crape myrtles often bloom earlier and can be used in a variety of ways in the landscape.

Petite Red Imp® is a dwarf cultivar with red flowers and a rounded growth form. Tightwad Red® has a rounded growth form with dense foliage and a true red flower color. ‘Victor’ is a dwarf compact form reaching three to five feet in height and dark red flowers.

The semi-dwarf cultivars of crape myrtle usually reach a height of less than 12 feet after ten years. ‘Cheyenne’ is a new release from the U.S. National Arboretum. Since it is a hybrid, it should have good disease resistance. ‘Christina’ produces vivid red flowers with yellow stamens and is a small to medium sized shrub with more of an upright-rounded form. Siren Red® is a new selection that produces dark red flowers. ‘Tonto’ is one of those older cultivars that shouldn’t be forgotten. It produces fuchsia red flowers and is

Semi-dwarf Red ‘Cheyenne’
(4 to 12 feet tall)
more disease resistant.

Of course we are all familiar with the tree form of crape myrtle. Tree-size cultivars reach heights greater than 20 feet after ten years. ‘Arapaho’ is a newer cultivar from the U.S. National Arboretum. According to some, this could be the best disease resistant red flowering crape myrtle. Red Rocket® produces large clusters of cherry-red flowers on an upright-rounded plant. And last, but not least, take a look at Dynamite®. Dynamite® is just that, exploding with red flowers that smother the foliage. Be aware however, that cloudy weather can fade some flowers to the point they turn white.

Thanks to breeders continuing to improve and introduce new crape myrtles, we now have red flowering cultivars in all sizes, suitable for any sunny spot in the yard or even in containers on the patio. True to the free-flowering nature of crape myrtle, these new cultivars should continue to produce bright red flowers throughout summer and into autumn.

**Tip of the Week:** Cannas that exhibit tightly rolled leaves this time of year may be infested with the canna leaf roller caterpillar. B.t. (Bacillus thuringiensis) is a biological control product that is effective on most caterpillars. It is sold under several trade names including Dipel and Thuricide. With all pesticide products, be sure to read and follow all label instructions.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.