

Helping  
Carolinians  
Increase Their  
Knowledge of  
Gardening,  
Manage Their  
Landscape  
Investment &  
Protect the  
Environment

## inside



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and Joy



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### JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

## Popular Crape Myrtles Now in Smaller Sizes

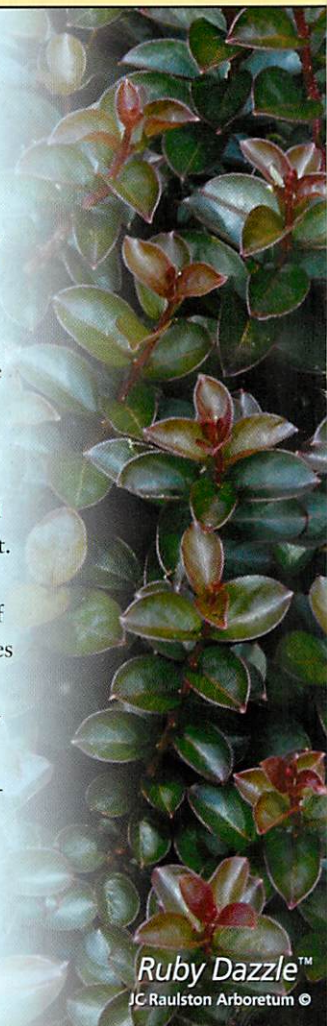
Crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia* species) are popular mainstays of the Southern garden. Their long bloom period during late summer provides beauty and landscape value when many other plants have succumbed to hot weather. Some people spell the common name with an "e" because the blooms look like crepe paper or the fabric crepe de Chine.

Both *Lagerstroemia indica* and *L. fauriei*, and hybrids between these species, produce plants that are used as large shrubs or small trees, growing from 15 to 30 feet tall. With the introduction of *L. subcostata*, breeding programs began developing dwarf cultivars.

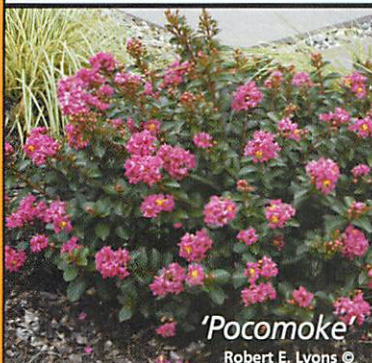
The National Arboretum introduced a series of crape myrtle cultivars that were named for Indian tribes. While most of these grow to tree size, two smaller selections, 'Chickasaw' and 'Pocomoke', grow 2 to 3 feet in height. There are currently several other active breeding programs across the country developing compact crape myrtles. New introductions include cultivars that are considered groundcovers. The prostrate growth of 'Rosey Carpet' is 4 to 8 inches in height.

A variety of colors including white, red, pink and purple are available in compact forms. 'Tightwad Red' is generally considered to be the best red dwarf but there are several others, such as Cherry Dazzle™. Others in the Dazzle series include Ruby Dazzle™ and Snow Dazzle™.

Most dwarf crape myrtles will flower for many weeks during summer. They can be grown as individual specimen plants in the front of the perennial or shrub border, or massed to achieve a groundcover effect. Since they are deciduous with limited winter interest, some gardeners place them in front of evergreens. Like standard crape myrtles, the dwarf forms are reliably cold hardy to zone 7a, and to 6b with some protection. 'Rosey Carpet' is rated as winter hardy to 10 degrees. It could be grown as a hanging basket in the western piedmont or mountains but would have to be brought inside over the winter. Most dwarf crapes are resistant to powdery mildew. **David Goforth**



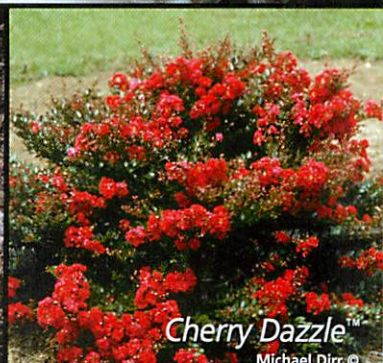
**Ruby Dazzle™**  
JC Raulston Arboretum ©



**'Pocomoke'**  
Robert E. Lyons ©



**Snow Dazzle™**  
JC Raulston Arboretum ©



**Cherry Dazzle™**  
Michael Djrr ©



## Tidings of Compost and Joy: Gift Ideas for the Gardener

Do you have a gardener on your holiday season gift list? Giving gardening gifts does not have to be a challenge. Whether you're looking for a gift for the beginner or the experienced gardener, gift ideas abound and can turn giving into a simple pleasure.

An interesting fact about people who work with tools is that it seems they can never have enough. Select high quality equipment that is sturdy and easy to handle. When selecting hand tools, think about the sturdy handles and how they will fit the hand of the person receiving your gift. Look for tools with cushioned grips. Some pruners come with longer, swivel handles designed to be ergonomically pleasing to use. A kneeling pad or kneeling seat might be useful. Other gifts that help make gardening easier include garden gloves, a wide-brimmed hat, a garden apron or a belt to hold your tools and cell phone.

Most gardeners have a thirst for knowledge, placing garden-related books and other reference material at the top of many gift lists. Look for sources that are specific to the growing conditions in North Carolina or the region. Some excellent choices to look for are:

- *The Carolinas Gardener's Guide*, by Extension's Successful Gardener team member and Cooperative Extension agent Toby Bost, and Jim Wilson of *The Victory Garden* fame
- *Month-by-Month Gardening in the Carolinas* by Bob Polomski
- *Best Garden Plants for North Carolina* by Pam Beck and Laura Peters
- *The Southern Gardener's Book of Lists* by Lois Trigg Chaplin
- *Tough Plants for Southern Gardens* by Felder Rushing

New gardeners may need more general plant books with many visuals along with the descriptive details. Seasoned gardeners may prefer more detailed reference materials that are on topics of their interest. The books of interest could include perennials, herbs, coastal plants and more. You may even wish to treat them to a subscription to *Extension's Successful Gardener*. Visit [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org) for a gift subscription or call (919) 513-3112.

There are several gardening cookbooks that connect the garden to the table for all to enjoy. You can even add your personal touch in the form of a

recipe book filled with wonderful gardening pictures to go along with the selected recipes. This is a chance to include local flavor with homemade sauces, jams, jellies, dips and other culinary goodies.

Look for garden-related gifts that are functional and beautiful. Non-gardeners and gardeners alike who spend time in the outdoors might enjoy a garden bench, comfortable outdoor furniture, wind chimes or a small water fountain.

Potted bulbs such as paper whites or amaryllis need little gardening attention as long as they are placed in a room with bright, natural light and are watered as needed to achieve bloom. Another idea is jewelry, which comes in many floral designs. A simple bouquet of flowers can be an elegant, thoughtful gift and just the ticket for some.

Wildlife in the garden can be the inspiration for other ideas. Consider giving a birdfeeder, birdbath, binoculars or bird identification book, a gift membership to a bird group or a year's supply of birdseed.

Weather-related equipment for a gardener with an interest in meteorology is a great idea. Weather gifts can run from the very inexpensive rain gauge made of plastic, to decorative metal, to wireless remote digital gauges that you can read from the comfort of your recliner through the receiver during hot and cold days. Several of the gauges will read the wind speed and phases of the moon.

For the gardener who seems to have everything, consider giving them a gift certificate or a coupon for your time in the future. There are many full-service garden centers, on-line companies and mail-order catalogs that are more than willing to provide you with a selected dollar value gift certificate. Giving a gift of your time in the form of a coupon is a fun way to help in the spring with the big seasonal garden activities like mowing, mulching, transplanting, weeding and raking. If you have a truck, a coupon for a delivery of mulch may be a wonderful gift. For the gardener who has a tendency to overdo it and ends up tired and sore, a certificate for a massage will work wonders.

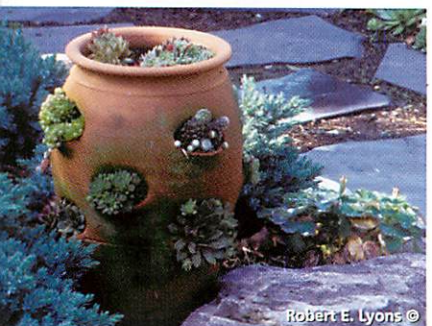
If you are still not sure about a gift, talk to a veteran gardener for ideas. Many public gardens offer memberships and opportunities for donations in honor of some special person. The ideas are just about limitless, so put those creative thoughts to work. **Stephen Greer**



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## Q&amp;A

## How do I protect tender plants from winter injury?

In November we often experience sudden drops in temperature and frosts that can be deadly to tender plants. Sunscald, frost heaving and desiccation are other concerns. Tender plants are those that are incapable of resisting these factors. Most houseplants, annuals, many herbs and some landscape plants are considered tender.

The “easy” solution is to bring the plants indoors or into a greenhouse before temperatures fall below 40 degrees F. Remember to inspect and treat for pests before bringing them in. A root drench of mild insecticide solution or warm water will prevent indoor surprises.

What if your indoor space is limited, or you have no greenhouse? Place container-

ized plants in protected areas, buried in the ground, grouped together or heavily mulched to avoid injury. Place a barrier of burlap over or around container and in-ground plants to protect from winter wind and sun damage.

Plants that are properly watered during dry periods are better equipped to withstand injury. Thoroughly water the soil around plants once every two weeks if necessary. Inspect soil moisture after freezes as well. Proper mulching around the base and entirely over the root zone of plants will help prevent the soil from freezing and thawing conditions that are responsible for heaving. Replant heaved plants quickly and re-mulch. Wait until spring to determine the extent of injury and need for replacement.

*Mike Wilder*

## Forcing Bulbs

Forcing spring-flowering bulbs indoors is a great way to have a taste of spring in your home during the winter. Several types of bulbs are available for forcing. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, paper whites and amaryllis are some of the most popular.

Amaryllis and paper whites are the easiest to force because they don't need a chilling period before they bloom. Tulips, daffodils and hyacinths need at least 13 weeks of moist chilling at 35 to 45 degrees F in order to bloom indoors. The bulbs may be kept in the refrigerator, but avoid putting them in the crisper drawers with ripening fruits and vegetables. The ripening process releases ethylene gas that may injure the bulbs. The bulbs will develop roots in the refrigerator, so keep the soil evenly moist.

Plant the bulbs in a well-drained, sterile potting mix with a pH from 6 to 7. Plastic or clay containers can be used as long as they have good drainage. Soak clay pots overnight before planting to keep the pots from drawing the moisture from the potting soil. Fill the bottom of the pot with soil so the top of the bulb will be even with the top of the pot. Put the flat side of the bulb next to the pot so the first leaf to emerge will be to the outside. Finish filling the pot with soil to within 1/2 inch of the top. Plan on blooms about four weeks after potting. If you pot some bulbs every two weeks, you can enjoy spring flowers all winter. *Mark Danieley*

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Clean and Service Power Equipment Before Storage

Too frequently, power equipment such as tillers, mowers and string trimmers are moved into off-season storage without any special preparation. When spring arrives, an expensive service or repair bill may cause unneeded frustration.

Before storing the equipment, check the owner's manual for the proper procedures. This usually includes cleaning the engine, emptying the fuel tank, draining the oil and lubricating the parts.

Blow off the top of the engine with an air compressor or leaf blower. Wash the underside of the mower deck with water, or brush away dry grass and other debris. Add a few drops of oil or spray lubricant on any exposed bolt threads. Run the engine until all the gasoline or 2-cycle mix is gone. Tilt the tank and drain any excess from the tank.

Loosen the spark plug and

brush lightly with a wire brush, or add carburetor cleaner to remove black carbon. Oil the threads and reinstall it. Leave the spark plug wire disconnected for safety.

While the engine is still warm, remove the drain plug and allow oil to drain completely from the crankcase. If extremely dirty, add fresh oil and turn the crank to allow the fresh oil to lubricate the piston and ring. If equipment is being stored in a damp or cool area, lubricate all movable parts such as wheels, throttle cables and bearings to reduce rust.

*Don Breedlove*



### Gardentalk



*“On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me . . . a truckload of well-aged horse manure.”*

*Barbara Damrosch*



## Gardening in November

### Lawns

- Apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet to lawns with tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and mixes of the two. To determine the amount of product you need, divide 100 by the first number on the fertilizer bag. Because some counties have water restrictions, contact your local Cooperative Extension Center before applying fertilizer.
- Water appropriately, according to your type of grass and soil, and the weather conditions. Use the free tool at [www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/TIMS/](http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/TIMS/) to get a customized recommendation for your lawn.

### Ornamentals

- Take a soil test and apply needed lime if you are planning to install a bed in the spring.
  - Plant containerized, ball-and-burlap or dormant bare-root trees and shrubs. Protect roots or root balls from freezing temperatures before planting. Dig a hole 2 to 5 times as wide as the root ball but no deeper than its height. Unless you are preparing and amending a large area for planting, use the soil removed when digging the hole to fill in around the roots.
    - In USDA Hardiness Zones 7 and 8, plant bulbs now that will flower in the spring and early summer.
    - Prune sasanqua camellias after flowering.
    - If you are planning to build, take a look at the new North Carolina Cooperative Extension publication *Construction and Tree Protection*. See [www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/forest/pdf/ag/ag685.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/forest/pdf/ag/ag685.pdf).

### Edibles

- Plant fruit trees.
- Remove fallen fruit and leaves from under fruit trees, bushes or vines sometime before overwintering pests are due to emerge.
- Take a soil test and apply needed lime for spring vegetable garden.

*Mary Helen Ferguson*

Garden Spot

A fun family activity during the holiday season is to visit a choose-and-cut farm to select a Christmas tree. Many options are available in North Carolina and one of the best places to visit before piling your family in the car is the **North Carolina Christmas Tree Association** Web site at [www.ncchristmastrees.com](http://www.ncchristmastrees.com). This site provides information about the location of retail lots, choose-and-cut farms, tree varieties available and a guide for choosing the best tree. The site also includes a kid's activity section and a teacher resource guide.

You will also find tree care advice along with Christmas tree trivia and facts. Find out how many times North Carolina trees have been chosen for the White House and how many Christmas trees are produced in our state each year. If you would like to order a Christmas tree by mail, the site will tell you how.

*Donna Teasley*



Amaryllis 'Masai' Robert E. Lyons ©

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- ▶ Garden Writers Association
- ▶ International Association of Business Communicators
- ▶ N.C. & National Associations of County Agricultural Agents
- ▶ Southern Extension Forest Resource Specialists
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Raleigh, NC 27695-7603

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