

## Beautiful Bark on 'WHIT' Series Crapemyrtle

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Crapemyrtle plants, when grown as single or multiple stem tree forms, develop attractive bark that contributes to the landscape, especially during fall and winter. Within the 9 cultivars of the 'Whit' series of crapemyrtle developed at Lacebark Research Farm, 7 will grow sufficiently large to make a single or multiple stemmed tree form.

All of the cultivars in the 'Whit' series of crapemyrtle were developed from seed from a single plant in the fall of 1985. Seeds were planted and a few of the most promising seedlings were selected as seed parents for the next generation. This process has now been repeated 18 times over a period of 27 years. The original parent plant was typical of *Lagerstroemia indica*, known as common crapemyrtle, and no plants or seeds from *L. fauriei* or other species have been used in the breeding process. As a result, all 'Whit' cultivars are pure *L. indica* and therefore have light tan bark that appears as though sanded, polished and varnished with slightly darker or lighter patches interspersed. Bark color varies only modestly among the 'Whit' cultivars. None have purplish or other bark coloration typical of *L. fauriei* or the various hybrids.

During early stages of growth, twigs and young stems are dull, brownish-grey. However, when 'Whit' series crapemyrtle reach stem diameters approaching  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch, bark begins to peel and slowly show mature characteristics. If exposing the attractive bark is a desired landscape feature, begin to remove small twigs and side branches when the plant is about 4 to 5 feet tall. Note: the lower branches on a young plant play a significant role in supporting root growth and stem development and should not be removed until the plant is well established and top growth has spread to the point where the inner and lower twigs and branches are being deprived of appreciable light. For greatest show of bark on crapemyrtle grown as tree forms, remove some of the inner and lower twigs and branches each winter. By doing this, the size of the scar on the main stem where the branch was removed will callous over within a growing season and will not leave a blemish on the polished bark.



***Bark pattern on 10 year old Red Rocket® crapemyrtle at Linnaeus Gardens in Tulsa, OK.***

When properly cared for, crapemyrtle bark on tree forms contributes sufficiently to the landscape in the 'off-season' so the spectacular flowers are not missed quite so much.

