

Dwarf Crepe Myrtle Care from BonsaiOutlet.com

General Background:

Dwarf Crape myrtle makes an excellent bonsai due to its exquisite branch formation and the contrast of the red upon silver of the peeling bark. It gets its common name from its crepe-like, crinkled petals and the resemblance of its leaves to the true myrtle, *Myrtus communis*. A native to Asia, the crape myrtle has been quite common in the southern US for over 150 years. It has small pink, white or purple flowers, and is often displayed in winter to show off its trunk and branch structure. Though its care is not considered difficult, there is certainly a need for proper attention to ensure proper health for this beautiful flowering tree. A little care will go a long way and will reward any bonsai lover with showy blooms and a lovely specimen as a garden prize.

Features:

With delicate, crinkled vibrant pink/purple flowers blossoming mid to late summer, the Dwarf Crepe Myrtle bonsai tree adds beautiful abundance of color to any deck, patio or garden. The flowers have six or seven crinkly-edged petals on stalks which occur in spike-like clusters. The tree's sinewy, fluted stems support opposing leaves of fresh green. These lovely plants never disappoint, providing long-lasting blooms, great fall foliage color, silvery exfoliating bark and an attractive branching form in winter. Crepe myrtles are available in colors ranging from white through pink to red, as well as shades of lavender.

Temperature:

The crepe myrtle bonsai can be successfully grown as an indoor plant; if this is done it should be kept at a temperature of 45-54 degrees in the winter to stimulate dormancy so that it can drop its leaves. If it is exposed to a combination of warm temperatures and low light, common conditions found indoors in the winter, the crape myrtle's new growth will be leggy and sappy. It is important to remember that this plant will only flower during a warm, dry summer.

Lighting:

This bonsai needs to be kept in full sun which will help prevent some of the less mildew-resistant varieties of crape myrtle trees from succumbing to the disease Defoliation is the natural result of being in the low-light environment.

Watering:

The Crepe Myrtle Bonsai will need well-drained soil that enjoys water Frequently in spring, and moderately during the rest of the year. Reduce watering in winter and just before flowering to encourage bud formation.

Fertilizing:

Don't over-fertilize crepe myrtles. Excessive fertilizing can reduce blooming, encouraging the plant to use its energy to increase foliar growth. In addition to reducing your viewing pleasure, the result is often winter injury. You can fertilize every two weeks in spring-autumn alternating a general purpose plant food or bonsai food with a low nitrogen tomato fertilizer.

Pruning / Training:

The crape myrtle flowers at the ends of its shoots, so one must take care with pruning if flowering is desired. The safest method is to prune in autumn which will stimulate bud production for next year. Cutting the crape myrtle back severely and then allowing it to grow freely for a year will thicken the trunk. The next year, pinch the tree constantly to promote branch ramification. If pruning is discontinued shortly before the flowering period, it may still flower.

This bonsai may be wired from spring to autumn, taking care to protect the bark. The branches are quite delicate and it will be just as easy to shape as desired through pruning due to the excellent branch ramification. Decide on the position or shape a branch is to occupy before bending it. Slowly apply a small amount of pressure with the thumbs, bending gradually, repeating in several locations rather than risk too much in one place. Repeat the process every few days.

Be sensitive to any increase or decrease in resistance; wiring should be carried out with attention and patience, ensuring that the wire on the bark is not tightened so hard that the wire leaves marks on it or breaks the branches under the stress of careless wiring.

Insects / Pests:

Scale and aphids are common problems easily dealt with using a solution of 1tsp dish soap and 1 quart warm water sprayed over the plant until runoff is achieved. Do not spray blossoms or they will brown. After spraying plant well, rinse with clean water and repeat as needed. Though Crepe Myrtles are susceptible to powdery mildew, you can make efforts to prevent this by ensuring that you do not train your bonsai to be too compact in its branching. Also, be sure to avoid over watering and provide good ventilation and plenty of light for your bonsai.

Propagation:

You can propagate your bonsai from seed in spring, or by softwood and semi-hardwood cuttings taken in spring or summer and given a treatment of rooting hormone to promote root growth.

Repotting:

Crepe myrtles should be repotted every 1-3 years in the early spring before blooming in a light, well drained soil with minimal root cutting.

Additional Comments:

Taking care to provide plenty of light and circulation will go a long way in keeping your Crepe Myrtle healthy. You will find that keeping the leaves dust free is an easy way to ensure optimal photosynthesis which will increase your plants vigor and heartiness.

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