Some species suitable for bonsai:

The "Tuscarora Crape Myrtle" are especially beautiful with coral-pink colored flowers and also worth mentioning are the "Dynamite Crape" and "Red Rocket Crape".

**Lagerstroemia hirsute**: - this native of India and New Guinea has purplish red or white flowers. Needs temperatures above 50 degrees, but also likes a cooler period in winter.

**Lagerstroemia indica**: crape myrtle, Chinese crape myrtle - Grows to 20 feet tall, with 9 inch flower clusters. There are many cultivars. can take temperatures as low as 43 degrees.

**Lagerstroemia indica 'Alba'**: white crape myrtle

**Lagerstroemia indica 'Amabilia'**: purple crape myrtle

**Lagerstroemia indica 'Cordon Bleu'**: - A dwarf with lavender flowers.

**Lagerstroemia indica 'Pixie Pink'**: - Very dwarf, with pink flowers.

**Lagerstroemia speciosa**: Queen’s crape myrtle - This tiny tropical plant grows to only 8 inches. Its flowers are pink to red. Keep at 50-59F in winter.

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Crape Myrtle Care

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”
— Mahatma Gandhi —

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S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado
(Most of the included information is obtained from several online sources.)
The Crape Myrtle

*(Lagerstroemia indica)*

**General Information:** Genus of 50 species of deciduous or evergreen trees occurring in deciduous woodland, often near rivers, in warm-temperate and tropical regions from Asia to Australia. The species commonly used for bonsai is Lagerstroemia communis or Lagerstroemia indica, the Crape Myrtle.

*L. indica* is an upright, deciduous tree with peeling, grey and brown bark and small dark-green, opposite leaves to 8cm. Each plant has separate male and female flowers; vast numbers appear in Summer clothing the tree in white, pink, red or purple depending on the variety.

Crape myrtle makes an excellent bonsai due to its exquisite branch ramification and the contrast of the red upon silver of the peeling bark. Native to Asia, the crape myrtle is very common in the southern US, having been introduced over 150 years ago. It has small pink, white or purple flowers, but is often displayed in winter to show off its trunk and branch structure. It gets its common name from its crepe-like, crinkled petals, and the resemblance of its leaves to the true myrtle, Myrtus communis, thus sometimes spelled Crepe myrtle. In cooler climates the leaves turn autumn colors before dropping its leaves. The Crape myrtle has a smooth bark that exfoliates in patches as it ages. The crape myrtle produces many different colors of flowers which appear in sprays in colors such as white, pink, purple, lavender, and watermelon red among others, depending upon the variety. Flowers appear on new wood from summer to winter. There are also dwarf or miniature varieties available such as 'Pocomoke'.

Pocomoke variety is a Dwarf Crape Myrtle which has small, shiny, dark green foliage, the new foliage starts out a bronze color changing to green. The Pocomoke variety flower color is a deep rose color and the flowers usually appear single as opposed to larger species which form in sprays. Protect from frosts.

**CARE**

**Temperature:** Zones 7-9A, although some of the dwarf cultivars can be grown as far north as zone 5. Can be successfully grown as an indoor plant; if this is done it should be kept at a temperature of 45°-54°F in the winter to stimulate dormancy - the crape myrtle should drop its leaves. In cooler climates the leaves turn autumn colors before dropping. If it is exposed to a combination of warm temperatures and low light (as inside many houses in winter) the crape myrtle's new growth will be leggy and sappy. The plant will only flower during a warm, dry summer.

Myrtles are not fully hardy and need to be brought indoors from October to May when there is a risk of night temperatures dropping below 35-38°F. Overwinter in a position in a partially heated room where temperatures are allowed to drop at night to allow leaf-drop and dormancy. Myrtles grown in areas with high summer temperatures are able to ripen growth relatively quickly and are more winter hardy.

**Lighting:** Full sun. This helps to keep it relatively pest and fungus free and promotes flowering. In summer Myrtles need to be placed outside in a sunny position though they will tolerate a sunny position indoors.

**Watering:** This tree likes a lot of water but only with well draining soil. Frequently in spring, moderately during the rest of the year. To promote flowering, allow the soil to dry slightly (similar to Bougainvillea). Reduce watering in winter and just before flowering to encourage bud formation. Ensure good humidity levels are provided by use of a gravel tray.

**Fertilizing:** pH should be kept between 6.5 - 7.5. Feed every two weeks from Spring to Autumn. Use a balanced plant food such as BonsaiPro diluted to 1/2 strength weekly or 12-10-10 slow release gradually during the growing season and a slow release type 2-10-10 over the winter as directed. Alternate bonsai food with a low nitrogen, high phosphate fertilizer. Do not feed during the winter when dormant.

**Pruning / Training:** Do not prune until Autumn as flower buds are formed on growth that develops from early Summer onwards. The safest method is to prune only in autumn, and in any case, a good autumn pruning will stimulate bud production for next year.

It is recommended to cut the crape myrtle back severely in the Autumn, then allowing it to grow freely for a year to 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.

Myrtles produce many upward growing shoots that need wiring down to produce branch structure, wiring is very easily carried out until branches reach 3 to 4 years of age at which point they become very brittle and snap easily. The branches are delicate, however, and it is just as easy to shape through pruning due to the excellent branch ramification.

**Insects / Pests:** Mealy bugs, scale, red spider mites and whiteflies can be a problem on indoor trees.

**Propagation:** Sow seed at 50-55°F in Spring. Root softwood cuttings in late Spring or semi-ripe cuttings with bottom heat in Summer.

**Repotting:** Annually in Spring as new growth commences, most safely done before bud burst and only when the night temperatures are in the upper 50's F. The Crape Myrtle is a fast grower and does not like to be root bound. Pot in a basic soil mix.

**Design and Styling:** Informal upright forms, cascade forms in medium to extra-large sizes. The dwarf varieties make excellent shohin bonsai.