

## EVALUATIONS and OBSERVATIONS: NEW *LAGERSTROEMIA* VARIETIES

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A landscape trial including most of the recently introduced crape myrtle cultivars has been initiated and expanded since 2013 at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, Hammond, La. These collections include the Early Bird, Enduring Summer, Delta, Barnyard Favorites, Magic, Miss, Princess and Ebony (aka Black Diamond) series. There is also a new group from Mississippi State University that includes 5 cultivars and new cultivars from Arkansas (Freedom, Cindy and Kitty's Purple from Stan Brown in Clarksville). Other new series not yet in our trials are Play It Again (Carl Whitcomb/Lacebark), Bellini (Conard Pyle), Infinitini (Proven Winners/Spring Meadow Nursery), Barista (Walter Gardens) and Emerald Empire (J Berry Nursery).

Several other cultivars are also included in the evaluation. We also have plants of Bayou View which is the *Lagerstreomia fauriei* national champion single-trunk crape myrtle tree located at Akin's Nursery in Shreveport. This plant dates to the 1950s/1960s and has been sold the past 4-5 years at the SFA Gardens Plant Sale in Nacogdoches, TX. We are also evaluating several lavender-flowered crape myrtle cultivars (New Lavender and First Lavender) from John Davy at Panhandle Growers, Pace, Florida.

The **Early Bird** series, introduced by Plant Development Services, Inc., has been on the market the longest and is part of the Southern Living Plant Collection. These are dwarf growing plants maturing at 4 feet. Early Bird Lavender (soft lavender) is promoted as a very heavy earlier bloomer. Other cultivars include Early Bird Purple and Early Bird White.

**Observations: Very early bloomers. Repeat bloom well in late summer. Leaf spot susceptibility, Early Bird White is largest grower in the collection (5 feet). Early Bird Lavender seems to be the consumer favorite.**

For several years, the burgundy-foliaged Delta Jazz (semi-dwarf, brilliant pink) was the only variety in the **Delta** series from Plant Development Services, Inc. has been a stand-alone cultivar (originally named Chocolate Mocha). This cultivar is included in the Southern Living Plant Collection. Five year old plants of Delta Jazz are 8 feet tall in most locations. Plants are classified as semi-dwarf growers, which normally indicate heights ranging from 8-12 feet. New for 2014 are four new color additions – Delta Breeze (light lavender), Delta Eclipse (brilliant purple), Delta Moonlight (white) and Delta Flame (dark red). New for 2016 are Delta Fusion (dark pink) and Delta Fuchsia (fuchsia).

**Observations: Burgundy foliage colored maintained spring through fall. Larger flowers than other series/varieties with burgundy or black foliage. Some powdery mildew observed some years in cool, overcast spring seasons. Bloom begins early to mid-June. Little to no leaf spot observed.**

The new black foliaged **Ebony** crape myrtles developed by Cecil Pounders at the USDA-ARS in Poplarville, MS are available to all growers. They are also sold under the **Black Diamond** name by J. Berry Nursery, Grand Saline, TX. The Black Diamond name is exclusive to J. Berry Nursery. These plants supposedly mature at 8-10 feet and retain foliage color spring through fall.

<u>Ebony Variety Name</u>	<u>Black Diamond Variety Name</u>
Ebony and Ivory (white)	Pure White
Ebony Flame (dark red)	Best Red
Ebony Embers (deep red)	Red Hot
Ebony Fire (dark red)	Crimson Red
Ebony Glow (light pink to white)	Blush

New additions to the Black Diamond series are Shell Pink (coral pink), Mystic Magenta (magenta pink) and Purely Purple (vibrant purple).

***Observations: Variable flowering year to year. Black Diamond White and Black Diamond Blush less vigorous growers than the red flowering varieties. Newer varieties are better bloomers. Black Diamond Mystic Magenta and Black Diamond Purely Purple have larger blooms and improved landscape performance. Blackish to very dark burgundy foliage present spring through fall. Little to no leaf spot observed. Some powdery mildew observed in springtime.***

Red Rooster (brilliant red), Purple Cow (deep purple) and Pink Pig (soft pale pink) are being sold as “mid-sized” growers and are promoted collectively as the “**Barnyard Favorites**” in the Gardener’s Confidence Collection. According to Gardener’s Confidence, Red Rooster is a plant to “crow about”, you can “squeal with delight” over Pink Pig, and Purple Cow can be used to create an “udderly majestic garden”.

***Observations: Cold damage observed early in trials on Purple Cow and Pink Pig. Red Rooster has very good red flower color and has better early growth rate than Dynamite. Leaf spot problematic on all three varieties. Undecided on mature height. Red Rooster is the best variety in the collection.***

The **Magic** series from Plant Introductions that are now part of the First Editions program by Bailey Nurseries includes Coral Magic (salmon pink), Purple Magic (dark purple), Plum Magic (fuchsia pink), Moonlight Magic (white) and Midnight Magic (dark pink). Coral Magic and Purple Magic have reddish new foliage in the spring. Plum Magic has plum purple foliage in the spring. Midnight Magic has purple maroon foliage that persists from spring to fall and Moonlight Magic has dark maroon foliage that persists from spring to fall. These are semi-dwarf plants (6-10 feet tall at maturity for Coral, Purple, and Plum, while Midnight matures at 4-6 feet and Moonlight matures at 8-12 feet) that were developed by Mike Dirr in Georgia at Plant Introductions, Inc. New additions to this group are Ruffled Red Magic (glowing red), Red Magic (red), and Twilight Magic (plum purple to burgundy foliage, pink flowers).

***Observations: Some of the Magic series has blackish foliage that is retained spring through fall while some varieties have burgundy foliage that is retained into late summer. Others just have burgundy foliage in the spring months. Cold damage observed on young plants of Plum Magic, Purple Magic and Coral Magic early in trials. Midnight Magic and Moonlight Magic are taller growers in the series. Leaf spot variable variety to variety with varieties having mostly green foliage later in season being more susceptible. Twilight Magic has unique flower color. Need more growth habit and flowering uniformity in this series.***

The **Princess** (aka Little Princess) series is a new dwarf group developed by Dow Whiting at Garden Adventures Nursery in Missouri and is being marketed as part of the Garden Debut program by Greenleaf Nursery. This series includes Holly Ann (cherry red), Kylie (magenta pink), Zoey (cherry red with cotton candy pink), Jaden (lavender) and Lyla (rose pink). Height varies from 2-6 feet on these cultivars.

*Observations: Favorite is Princess Lyla. Variable height variety to variety. Some leaf spot susceptibility. Princess Jaden is most dwarf and may be too slow of a grower. Zoey has unique “peppermint” (bicolor) flower characteristic.*

Ball Ornamentals released the **Enduring Summer** collection of crape myrtles. Varieties are Enduring Summer Red, Enduring Summer Fuchsia, Enduring Summer Pink, Enduring Summer White and Enduring Summer Lavender. These plants were also developed by Mike Dirr. These are reported to have re-blooming characteristics. The Enduring Summer cultivars have an upright habit and mature height is 6-8 feet with a 4-foot spread. These are now marketed by Conard-Pyle Company.

*Observations: Enduring Summer Red is best of the series. Cold damage on other varieties in the series in LSU AgCenter trials. Enduring Summer Red very similar in phenotype to Red Rooster. Some leaf spot disease.*

The new **Miss** series of *L. indica* from Cecil Pounders’ breeding work at USDA-ARS Poplarville, MS includes Miss Gail (20 feet, upright vase shape, purple violet flowers), Miss Frances (16-18 feet, round spreading, red) and Miss Sandra (18-20 feet, upright spreading purple violet).

*Observations: Need to be considered. Nice growers. Common green foliage. Intermediate habit. Miss Frances has outstanding red flowers (comparable red flowers to Freedom variety from Stan Brown in Arkansas; better red than Dynamite). Only minor leaf spot occurs in average/above average rainfall years.*

The new crape myrtle group from **Mississippi State University’s Coastal Research and Extension Center** (unnamed series) released by Patricia Knight and Wayne McLaurin include Neshoba, Pascagoula, Sequoyah, Shumaka and Tishomingo. These have been on trial with several MS growers over the past 5 years. These have not yet been generally-distributed to the industry.

*Observations: Have not been in trials very long. Need more time for observations. Neshoba blooms well into the fall months and may be best of the series.*

Data collected during our evaluations include flowering dates, durations, and quantities, fungal (*Cercospora*) and bacterial (*Xanthomonas*) leaf spot susceptibility ratings, and height measurements. We are also observing for “rabbit tracks”, retention of burgundy/black foliage characteristics and other things. This evaluation will continue through 2019-2020.

*Not included in these trials but previously evaluated:*

In the Gardener’s Confidence Collection is the **Razzle Dazzle** crape myrtles. These have been around for 10 years or so now. These are true dwarfs with heights reaching 4 feet. Cultivars include Berry Dazzle (fuchsia), Cherry Dazzle (cherry red), Dazzle Me Pink (pink), Diamond Dazzle (pure white), Strawberry Dazzle (neon rose) and Sweetheart Dazzle (pink). Cherry Dazzle has been a longtime exceptional performer in LSU AgCenter landscape trials.

Also, crape myrtle varieties developed by Carl Whitcomb in Oklahoma (Lacebark) include Dynamite, Pink Velour, Red Rocket, Siren Red, Tightwad Red, Raspberry Sundae and Burgundy Cotton. Most of these have been evaluated in LSU AgCenter trials in recent years. *Cercospora* leaf spot and powdery

mildew are significant issues with growing these varieties in south Louisiana. Also developed by Dr. Whitcomb are the new **Play It Again** series which includes Double Dynamite and Rhapsody in Pink.

*Not yet included in these trials but have been introduced (or are being introduced) and will be included shortly:*

Spring Meadow Nursery (marketed by Proven Winners as part of their Color Choice Flowering Shrub Program) has released in 2016 the **Infinitini** series. These include Orchid (lavender), Magenta (magenta), Brite Pink (pink) and Watermelon (bright pink red). These are being promoted as 3-5 foot growers but will get larger in southern United States growing conditions.

New for 2016 from Walters Gardens is the **Barista** series of crape myrtles. This includes six cultivars - Cherry Mocha (cherry red flowers), Frappe Pink (true pink), Like a Latte (pure white), Sweet Macchiato (hot pink), Bubble Tea (bright lilac purple) and Spiced Plum (raspberry purple). There is also what appears to be a new addition to the series called 'Cool Beans' (peppermint, bicolored). These are northern climate developed cultivars that are promoted as root hardy as far north as USDA hardiness zone 6.

Another new series currently being released is from J Berry Nursery in Texas. The **Emerald Empire** series will initially include Amethyst King, Garnet King, Garnet Queen and Ruby Prince (deep red). The complete collection will include King (20 feet growers), Queen (12-14 feet growers) and Prince (dwarf, 3-4 foot growers).

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