

Question: The dwarf crepe myrtle in my backyard has developed a layer of gray dust/fuzz on its new growth. What is it and do I need to do something to rid the tree of it?

Answer: Your crepe myrtle likely has powdery mildew, a fungus which is relatively common on susceptible crepe myrtle varieties and other plants. There are several fungi that we collectively refer to as powdery mildew. The most common on crepe myrtle is *Erysiphe lagerstroemiae*. The general characteristics and treatment of all are similar.

Powdery mildew is not typical of many fungi in that it can spread in relatively warm weather and does not need a damp environment. It prefers warm, dry weather. If only a few branches are affected, we recommend pruning them out. Rake up and dispose of any fallen leaves now and in the fall when leaf drop occurs. Dispose of all infected plant materials in the garbage or brown bin, not your compost pile.

If many of the branches are affected with powdery mildew, it might not be possible to prune them all out. In this case you can expect some distorted leaf growth and fewer flowers. There are few effective treatments available to the home gardener once the disease has become well established, but some may be moderately effective. Spraying powdery mildew with a strong stream of water can kill the spores and slow the spread. It will not eliminate the infection entirely. Spraying with one of the refined petroleum based horticultural or plant-based oils such as neem or jojoba oil can be effective to reduce the infection and deter spread. Oils should not be sprayed when the temperature exceeds 90 degrees or when plants are water stressed.

Prevention is much easier than eradication. Wettable sulfur products mixed with a surfactant can help prevent the disease if sprayed before symptoms appear. There are a number of pre-mixed commercial products available. Sulfur products should not be applied when the temperature exceeds 90 degrees. Sulfur products and oils must not be applied within two weeks from each other. There are also some biological fungicides available to the home gardener that contain a bacterium that can prevent the fungus from infecting the plant. Consult a nursery professional to choose an appropriate product.

Good cultural practices are important preventive measures. A Crepe Myrtle planted in full sun rather than a shady spot should have less trouble with powdery mildew. Pruning overhanging trees may help your crepe myrtle. Air circulation is also key. If possible, make sure your plant is not crowded by other plants. Thinning out its branches may provide some benefit. Use a low nitrogen or time release fertilizer since new growth is most susceptible.

Finally, when choosing crepe myrtle in the future, there are cultivars that are resistant to powdery mildew. One group of such cultivars are those with Native American names, e.g.,

'Catawba,' 'Cherokee,' 'Hopi' as well as Acoma, Christina and Centennial Spirit among others.

Below is a link to an article about powdery mildew on crepe myrtles that goes a bit more in depth.

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/ccmg/files/123752.pdf>