



Pruning: Butterfly Bush & Crape Myrtle

Pruning Butterfly Bush is not rocket science, should you prune too hard, results will be fine and should you prune too light, results will be fine. What is not acceptable is pruning in the growing season, and in the early spring on these super fast growing shrubs.

I enjoy Butterfly Bush in my landscape garden because it works, it attracts butterflies all the time and especially when fresh blossoms are numerous. Fresh blossoms can be continuous with proper pruning.

Butterfly Bush can be sensitive to the cold of winter, at my home here in central Pennsylvania, we are a cold zone 5 in most winters, sometimes the weather acts as zone 4 or zone 6. Regardless, in most years Butterfly Bush acts like a perennial, as does Crape Myrtle, in my backyard. This means it may die back to ground level and sprout from there each spring, usually very late in spring, around Mother's Day for me.

I know many home gardeners believe they have lost these plants when in reality, they just need time and warm soil temperatures to get growing. To combat loss to cold, I allow my Butterfly Bush and Crape Myrtles to go into dormancy naturally by doing no late season pruning. This means, with my Butterfly Bush I do not do any pruning after September 1st; a couple weeks later for areas south of here and a week or more earlier in the New England region. This allows the plant to store all the needed food for surviving harsh dry and cold winters.

I also have these items planted on the southeast side of my home that offers some protection from winter winds and allows for early spring warmth to get a jump start. As you can see in the video, this time of year I am left with these tall, thin looking wispy dead branches, but I have allowed for winter survival by leaving these be through fall and all winter. Early in March, as soon as it gets above freezing, so I can enjoy, not so much for the plants benefit, I prune off all this dead wood back to about 12" and I thin out some of the oldest canes as well.



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Now, the wood in fact may not be dead, in winters where we have early snow cover and the plants remain protected for most of the winter the entire branch can survive, however, this does not change our pruning timing or methods. So both the Butterfly Bush and the Crape Myrtle receive their annual early season haircut in early March.



Because of aggressive pruning, the plants will flourish and produce first bloom in mid to late May for Butterfly Bush and mid July for Crape Myrtle. In season pruning and maintenance; the growing season is where these two plants will now be pruned differently. Crape Myrtle blooms one time for a long period of time. So we want to avoid cutting any branches again after our initial prune. My Crape Myrtles will reach 4' to 5' in one season here and flower from July through August and put on a great show. But remember, other than our early March prune, no additional pruning is needed.

Butterfly Bush: I prune mine hard one more time during the growing season. I usually do this about mid to late July. This is the time when they begin to look a little tired and run down, so I will prune the bush by 50%, take half off, one quick easy prune! Then in just a few weeks we experience another huge bloom time and fresh growth. The last and second hard prune of the year.



At other times throughout the growing season, about every two weeks, we will 'dead head' the Butterfly Bush, this means we simply remove past and spent blooms back into the branch. This promotes new bud set and new growth as well but allows for the enjoyment of continued color. Like removing the dead blossoms on your annuals, regularly perform this task with your Butterfly Bush.

Listen, both Butterfly Bush and Crape Myrtle enjoy plenty of water and are heavy feeders. The more you provide these two things the better your flowering results will be. Although, either of these plants will perform well under the most adverse conditions on the garden. They can take the heat from the sun and from neglect! But, with a couple of simple, timely prunes you can experience season long reward with these two summer bloomers.

- Don Eaton
Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team