

Crapemyrtle Bark Scale

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The crapemyrtle bark scale (CMBS, *Acanthococcus lagerstroemiae*) is an exotic pest that causes damage to crapemyrtles. Large populations can cause branch dieback and eventual tree mortality. This insect also produces honeydew (a sticky, sugary excrement) which can harbor a sooty mold infestation. CMBS is native to Asia and was first detected in Texas in 2004. The known distribution of CMBS is from Texas east to Florida and north to New York. As its name indicates, CMBS infests crapemyrtles, which are one of the most common ornamental plants in the southern landscape and beloved for their summer flowering.

Description and Life Cycle

CMBS can overwinter either as eggs or as immature nymphs that actively feed. Eggs hatch into small, mobile crawlers in the spring and migrate to the plant's succulent new growth. The eggs and crawlers are pink in color. Adult females secrete a white, waxy ovisac around themselves and their eggs for protection (Figure 1).

Two to four generations of CMBS can occur in a single growing season depending on the location; however, generations often overlap and multiple life stages are likely to be present at any time. Crawler populations peak in early and late summer. Crawlers that become males cease feeding, but females continue feeding as they produce eggs.

Damage

Small infestations generally go unnoticed. However, reduced flowering, branch dieback, and tree mortality can result from large CMBS infestations (Figure 2). Large populations are often conspicuous as the twigs may appear white from accumulated ovisacs.

Figure 1: Pink CMBS eggs and crawlers



Figure 2: CMBS-infested branch



CMBS also produces honeydew, a sugary excrement, when feeding. Honeydew is sticky and hard to remove from cars, sidewalks and porches.

Sooty mold is a superficial fungus that can establish on honeydew and give the tree and other structures a black appearance (Figure 3). Even after pest management, this growth can persist on stems or foliage. Scrubbing gently may help improve aesthetics.

Figure 3: Accumulated sooty mold



Honeydew secretions can also attract wasps and other insects looking for a sugary food source. Ants are commonly found collecting honeydew and will protect CMBS from potential predators.

Management

Managing CMBS populations while they are small prevents large infestations and mitigates branch dieback and honeydew issues. Therapeutic products are available and effective against CMBS. Dormant season treatments can reduce the number of viable scales in the following spring. Topical treatments during the growing season should coincide with peak crawler activity. Systemic options are available but must be timed appropriately to mitigate impacts on beneficial insects.

Many naturally occurring predators, including lady beetles and lacewings, can be found feeding on CMBS of every life stage (Figure 4). Augmenting predator populations with biological control agents may help to suppress outbreaks but are less effective against large, established CMBS populations.

Figure 4: Lady beetle larva feeding on an ovisac containing viable eggs



Maintaining and encouraging plant health via root invigoration programs, appropriate irrigation and proper structural pruning will help crapemyrtles defend themselves against CMBS. Please contact your Bartlett Arborist Representative to learn about management strategies.



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