

TREE NEWS

APRIL 2023

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

EMERGING AND RECURRING PEST

Crape Myrtle Bark Scale in Tennessee

What is Crape Myrtle Bark Scale (CMBS)?

CMBS was first seen in Texas in 2004 and has since become a major pest of crape myrtle in the southeastern U.S. Damage is mostly aesthetic, but heavy infestations will be quite unsightly with heavy sooty mold on the branches and the trunk that can reduce vigor and bloom. The spread of CMBS across the southeast was thought to be associated with distribution of infested plant material initially, then by bird and human activity such as pruning and removal of infested plant material.

If you live in West Tennessee, by now, you have probably encountered CMBS; however, those who are in Middle and East Tennessee are just getting to know this pest and its effects on Crape Myrtle.



What to look for

While heavy infestations are conspicuous, initial signs of the pest may easily be overlooked. Early detection is possible by looking for white dots along crape myrtle branches. Upon closer inspection, adult female scales are off-white, have a felt-like texture, and are about one-tenth of an inch long. Recently infested trees will likely have scale concentrated in the textured bark of branch unions and along small diameter twigs within the canopy. Use a pointed instrument to break the felt-like exterior, and the insects will bleed pink. You may also notice pink egg clusters.

As the infestation progresses, you may observe higher density of adult scale insects. Heavily infested crape myrtles will likely show twigs that are entirely encrusted with white scale. The insects produce large quantities of honeydew, which result in the accumulation of black sooty mold on affected trees and their surroundings. While host trees are rarely killed outright, growth and flowering may be severely limited.

Management and Control

If left untreated, the CMBS will spread rapidly. Once the insects have found your tree, controlling CMBS while keeping your crape myrtles looking their best will be an ongoing effort. Treatment of small trees can be accomplished by applying a sponge and soapy water to the affected branches. Larger trees and trees with heavy infestations will require a more intensive regimen of winter dormant oil sprays and an application of systemic insecticides, such as products containing imidacloprid or dinotefuran.



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