

Crepe Myrtle Bark Scale

Since 2013, in west Tennessee, there has been a suspicious decrease in the health and appearance of one of the South's ubiquitous flowering tree species, the crepe myrtle. If you live in the Mid-South, you most likely have a crepe myrtle in your yard or certainly in your neighborhood. For years, these trees have been "bullet proof" without any major natural insect enemies or diseases. Now we have seen the same issue spread into other parts of the Memphis-Metropolitan area as well as North Mississippi. Shrubs, grass, walkways, and vehicles underneath the canopies of these crepe myrtles may show a sticky substance and look to be turning black along with the tree itself. The pest causing this damage is called Crepe Myrtle Bark Scale (CMBS).



A few facts about CMBS

- Adult female, what you may see on the tree, are round and gray-white in color
- Adult female is immobile – no wings or legs
- Adult male has wings but doesn't feed
- Immobile in its adult stage
- The eggs are laid underneath the insect.
- After hatching, the juvenile crawlers will find a spot and then mature
- Two-three generations throughout the season

Where did they come from?

CMBS is more than likely a scale species found on crepe myrtles native to Asia. The original U.S discovery was made outside of Dallas, Texas in 2004. It has since spread to Louisiana, Oklahoma, Georgia, Arkansas, and was first identified in Germantown, Tennessee in 2013. During the 2014 season, infestations were identified in Collierville, Cordova, Fayette County, and North Mississippi. Even though the juvenile crawlers are mobile, they do not venture very far from where they hatch. The most probable ways for the scale to cross such long distances is by birds and transplanted crepe myrtles. If purchasing a crepe myrtle, be sure to inspect your plant for any symptoms to ensure you are not inviting it into your landscape.

Damage they cause

Damage occurs in two ways. The scale insect uses its straw-like mouth part to pull sap from the vascular tissue of the tree and a fungus called sooty mold grows on a secretion made by the scale referred to as "honeydew". While the sooty mold does not attack the plant it is covering, it will create an artificial shade that blocks sunlight and obstructs the trees ability to produce food. The death of a tree has



Sooty mold growing on honey dew secreted by the scale.



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