

Biology and Management of Crape Myrtle Bark Scale for Homeowners

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Crape Myrtle Bark Scale (CMBS), *Acanthococcus lagerstroemiae*, is an exotic insect pest that feeds only on crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia* spp.). CMBS infestations can damage tree health and appearance if left unmanaged. CMBS was originally found in Texas in 2004 and has spread throughout the southeastern US and North Carolina.



Crape myrtle bark scale infestations. Gary Brooks, Bayer CropScience, Bugwood.org

Biology:

Adult CMBS females are small, flat, and oval-shaped insects found on the bark of crape myrtles. They are in a group called felt scales. They have white or gray waxy covering and produce fluffy white egg cases that look like cotton swabs. Nymphs live on bark amongst the adults and are pink or orange with varying amounts of white wax. CMBS has at least two generations each year, likely more in warmer regions and in urban areas. In many parts of NC all life stages are found throughout the year.

CMBS feeds on the phloem sap of crape myrtles using their piercing-sucking mouthparts. As they feed, they excrete honeydew, which is a sugary liquid that promotes the growth of sooty mold, leading to blackened, unsightly foliage.

Damage:

Heavy infestations can reduce growth and flowering of crape myrtle trees, resulting in weakened and unhealthy plants. The honeydew excreted by CMBS is a substrate for sooty mold growth. This black, powdery mold covers leaves, stems, and other surfaces.

Management:

Inspect crape myrtle trees for signs of CMBS infestation, such as white to gray fluff or wax on branches and trunks. Remove heavily infested branches and stems to reduce infestations.

Some homeowners use a pressure washer or hose to remove scales from the bark. This is an easy, inexpensive, and non-toxic way to reduce CMBS abundance.

Horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps can reduce CMBS abundance especially when crawlers (newly hatched nymphs) are present. Systemic insecticides can be applied to the soil to provide longer management. Imidacloprid is the systemic most commonly found in retail stores. This is a neonicotinoid insecticide that may contaminate flower parts that bees and other beneficial insects visit. Other insecticides can be applied by professionals.

4. Natural predators, such as ladybugs and lacewing larvae, can help manage CMBS populations. Encourage a diverse and balanced ecosystem in your yard to support these beneficial insects. Mosquito sprays can kill these beneficial insects and lead to pest outbreaks.



Sooty mold covering a tree and a leaf with sooty mold and a twice-stabbed lady beetle, a predator of CMBS. Jim Robbins, Univ. of Ark. CES, Bugwood.org Mengmeng Gu, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Bugwood.org

Seek advice from local extension offices for region-specific guidance.

Wake County Extension Center: 919-250-1100; <https://wake.ces.ncsu.edu/>

NCSU Plant Disease and Insect Clinic: 919-515-9530; <https://pdic.ces.ncsu.edu/>