# Treating Scales with Oil

Because of our climate in south Louisiana, there is a limited time frame in which we can apply oil-based sprays. The intense summer sun and heat are the limiting factors. Think of a beam of sunlight going through a magnifying glass in the middle of the summer. If applied in the summer sun, an oil-based spray will burn the leaves of your plant. The time to spray oil sprays is NOW!

Camellias and sasanquas are one of my go-to plant when making recommendations for hardy landscapes around your home. They bloom, they're evergreen, they're low maintenance, and they don't get too wild too fast. They're just all-around good plants. But the one thing I must warn you about, is scales. They can be notorious for housing hosts of scales. If you've been gardening in Louisiana for any amount of time, you've probably come across scales. But maybe you didn't even know what they were. They can be found on just about any type of plant, but at the end of the day, they're all still scales.

Scales come in all different shapes, colors and sizes, but most commonly they are white. They live in clusters on the branches and/or on the undersides of the leaves. They are immobile, yet they suck the life out of a plant, often causing yellowing on the tops of the leaves. Sometimes they will have a hard exterior shell, and sometimes they will be soft bodied. The ones with the hard shells, we call those armored scales. The soft bodied ones, we call those tea-scales.

Horticulture and or Neem oil can be used to treat soft-bodied scales only. For the oil to be effective, it needs to coat the entire exterior of the scale. When completely coated, the scale suffocates and dies. It will likely still be stuck to the plant or leaf for several days or weeks after being dead. To make sure that they are dead, try to peel off one of the scales from a leaf or branch. Did it easily flake off? Or was it kind of still "stuck" to the leaf. When it peels off, is there a small black speck, or is it yellowish orange? If it is a hue of yellow or orange, it is still alive.

Sometimes you will need multiple application of the oil for complete control. In fact, it may take several seasons for complete control, depending on the density of the infestation. So don't let it get out of control. If you see an infestation, spray it before it gets worse.

Remember, you need to coat the entire scale. So be sure to aim your spray towards the undersides of the leaves. This is not like a systemic chemical that will be absorbed through the leaves. It NEEDS to come in contact with the scales!

Also, do not spray an oil-based spray on a plant that is blooming, or about to bloom. It will damage the flowers and could kill some beneficial insects that are feeding on the scales.

Not many plants are immune to scales, so do some scouting this weekend. Look closely at all your trees and shrubs. Look at the stems, and the undersides of the leaves. Check your azaleas, camellias, magnolias, hollies and viburnums. And if you find some scales, get spraying! Now is your chance! Happy Planting

*Written by John MacMillan*