CRAPEMYRTLE BARK SCALE (CMBS)

The scale insect, Eriococcus lagerstroemia, found in China, Japan, and Korea, is now over the last fourteen years found in the southeastern United States feeding on crapemyrtles and pomegranates. It is found in it's native China in cold hardiness zones 6-10. It causes extensive honeydew deposits and the growth of black sooty mold on small twigs to large trunks of the crapemyrtle. Crapemyrtle is a popular landscape plant throughout the southern U.S., generating $46 million in wholesale farm revenue each year.

Adult females may be identified as felt-like white or gray encrustations on parts of the crapemyrtle. When crushed they exude a pink, "blood"-like liquid. You may also see dozens of pink eggs and 'crawlers'. These may be seen on the horizontal undersides of twigs away from sunlight. The first thing most noticeable is a black sooty mold on twigs and branches.

As the female nymph matures she secretes waxy white threads that become matted and cover the entire insect body. They are immobile and lay eggs under the covering from May to September. Like other scale insects, the first instar or stage are mobile and are thus called 'crawlers'. The females do not disperse from the plant but are spread locally by wind or birds, and long distances on plant materials. There may be two or three generations per year and over-winter as adult females under loose bark or in cracks and crevices.

Heavy scale infestations are seldom fatal but the aesthetic impacts are quite significant. The best control is to carefully inspect nursery stock for signs of the insect and to avoid plants with noticeable mechanical injuries or wounds which provide easy access for the scale. Scrubbing the plant with a soft brush and a mild liquid dishwashing soap to remove female scale, egg masses and black sooty mold has shown to be effective. The use of dormant oil per label directions in winter will smother insects harbored in cracks, crevices and under loose bark.

Some Lady beetle species are effective predators in the pupae stage that looks like tiny red/orange alligators.

Crapemyrtle bark scale may appear to be difficult to control without the use of systemic insecticides which are used to control sucking pests. However, at this time, OSU Extension specialists for horticultural insects, are not recommending

use of systemic, neonicotinoid insecticides (i.e., products containing imidacloprid, dinotefuran, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam) for control of CMBS because of the risk these active ingredients pose to pollinating insects such as honey bees and bumble bees and the long flowering period of crapemyrtles that extends throughout most of the growing season.