

Crapemyrtle Bark Scale

Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstomia indica*) has been a longtime favorite ornamental shrub of homeowners as it blooms profusely throughout our very hot summers. The fall color and bark add interest to our fall and winter landscapes. Do you recall if your **crapemyrtles** were not looking so great at the end of last fall? Did the trunks and branches look blackened and the bloom less prolific? This is likely due to **crapemyrtle bark scale (CMBS)** which diminishes the appearance of these wonderful shrubs. It is a new exotic pest from Asia that has been wrecking havoc on these shrubs throughout the South for the past seven years. It is now readily being seen in Oklahoma, especially in Tulsa County.

The females will start laying their eggs in late April/early May and they are sessile. The males are winged and will fly, thus increasing the spread. In addition, the eggs can overwinter and will be hatching in the spring. The scale insects deposit honeydew on the trunks and branches which encourages the growth of sooty mold which makes the trunks and branches look black. The appearance of white scale bodies on the bark and a pink liquid exuded when crushed will help to identify it from the crape myrtle aphid, another pest that can cause black sooty mold. Blackened trunks and branches are then detected by homeowners, followed by poor bloom and an undesirable appearance.

Management is difficult to control without the use of systemic insecticides. However, there are downsides to using such insecticides, as described below in the Pest e-Alert. So, it is first recommended to try to control **CMBS** using other methods that are more environmentally friendly. First, make sure your shrubs are healthy by properly mulching, irrigating, fertilizing, and pruning them. Use a mild solution of dishwashing soap and scrub the areas that look white with a mealy bug cottony appearance. Secondly, try to cut off the blackened areas from last year and dispose of them in a trash bag. There are some winter horticultural oils that can be used which will also help with control if they are applied early enough (see point #3 below). Carefully follow all label directions after you have cleansed the areas that are suspicious. Finally, note that **crapemyrtles** that are grown in shadier areas seem to be the most affected so planting in sunny locations should help with the issue.

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OSU Pest e-Alert on CMBS

For even more detailed information on this disease and preventative control measures, the OSU Pest e-Alert offers the following:

Crapemyrtle bark scale appears to be difficult to control without the use of systemic insecticides, which are used to control most sucking pests. However, at this time, it

is NOT recommended to use 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.

Therefore, current management recommendations for CMBS infestations in Oklahoma include the following:

1. **Inspection:** Carefully inspect crapemyrtles prior to purchase for signs and symptoms of CMBS, including the presence of white to gray scale bodies on bark, honeydew, and/or black sooty mold. Always buy plants that are free of mechanical damage such as bark wounds that may serve as “points of entry” for CMBS.
2. **Washing:** The bark of infested plants can be scrubbed with a soft brush and a mild solution of dishwashing soap and water. Washing removes many of the female scales and egg masses as well as buildup of black sooty mold on branches and trunks.
3. **Dormant oil:** If this is a common pest on your crapemyrtles, then horticultural oil may be effective when applied during the winter at a dormant application rate. Ensure adequate coverage of the entire tree and use enough oil to reach behind loose bark, branch crotches, and other crevices.
4. **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** Lady beetles in the genus *Chilocorus* are effective predators of many scale insects. However, predation of CMBS occurs too late in the season for effective reduction in the growth of black sooty mold. Over time, additional predators and parasitoids may be discovered attacking CMBS and contributing to natural control of this pest.

For a complete list of products available for managing scale insects in nurseries, see Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service publication, CR-7092: Management of Insects and Mites in Tree Nurseries.

For further information on this subject:

Texas A&M Extension *Agrilife*
Clemson edu/factsheet/crapemyrtle-bark-scale