Regional Eruption of Crape Myrtle Bark Scale (CMBS) Affecting Rehoboth Beach

Pai Jih Hung – meaning "100 days of red" – is the Chinese name for the Crape Myrtle, a common ornamental tree in our landscapes. But some Rehoboth Beach residents may think "365 days of black" when they see their Crape Myrtles charred as if they caught fire. This article aims to bring awareness to Rehoboth Beach property owners of a national ecological disturbance causing such symptoms**.**

Don't let your Crape Myrtles go from this…

…To this

What is CMBS

CMBS is a small sap-sucking insect with several life stages (egg, nymph, pupa, and adult) (*LSU AgCenter*). Most stages are small enough to go unnoticed with the naked eye. Adult females develop a white-grayish protective coating.

What's the Damage?

The insects have piercing mouthparts with which they penetrate the tree's bark and feed on the sap. Scale insects digest the sap and then excrete a sticky, sugary solution: **honeydew**. The presence of honeydew is another good indicator of a scale infestation. It can attract wasps, yellow jackets and other flying insects. The effects we see are primarily crown dieback, little or no growth, and loss of blooms. **sooty mold** accumulates on untreated trees with CMBS.

Photo: REHOBOTH BEACH – After treatment, dead CMBS and Sooty Mold begin to fall off as the tree sheds its bark.

Sooty Mold

Sooty mold is the black fungus that covers bark and leaves thereby giving the tree a charred look. Brian Kunkle of UD Cooperative Extension in Sussex County points out that sooty mold "is not a disease. It does not harm the health of trees or shrubs." While it may be an unsightly symptom for many, it is just that – a symptom (and indicator) of a much larger problem. If sooty mold is seen on a car, fence, or patio – which we often see - it is surviving on the excretions of the scale insects feeding on your trees above.

Mr. Kunkle agrees that the best option for sooty mold removal is to allow it to "weather off" after gaining control of the insect population. Some local residents have opted to use a diluted Dawn dish detergent solution with a scrub brush and plenty of rinsing. Others have power-washed the trunks. If the scale is not controlled, the sooty mold will return and persist.

Moving Forward: Management

CMBS is certainly going to be a member of our local ecology for years to come. The Universities of Maryland and Delaware are involved in extensive research and experimenting with management options that are ecologically sound. A local certified arborist who works closely with extension agents is best equipped to provide the necessary guidance, prevention, and treatment.

If you decide to trim your tree, **Do Not** place diseased branches with your other yard waste as this waste is ground up into mulch and will spread the disease. Please place with your household trash to ensure the disease does not spread more widely.

You can read more about crape myrtle bark disease and how to prevent and treat it by going to the following link https://mcusercontent.com/910cb0a84b3564f21bd4b19d9/files/fe90190e-3c8a-1bea-5910-39d12a378b41/Crape_Myrtle_Bark_Scale_sussex_county.pdf

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