

# BIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CRAPEMYRTLE BARK SCALE: LANDSCAPE AND NURSERY GROWERS

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Crapemyrtle bark scale (*Acanthococcus lagerstromiae* [Hemiptera: Eriococcidae]) was reported for the first time in the United States (US) in 2004 near Dallas, Texas. Although initially thought to be a population of the native azalea bark scale (*Acanthococcus azaleae*) feeding on crapemyrtles, it was later discovered that the scale in question was an introduced species from Southeast Asia, where crapemyrtles and the crapemyrtle bark scale are considered native.

The crapemyrtle bark scale has since spread across the US, occupying over 12 states from the east to west coasts. For the current distribution, visit <https://stopcombs.com/crapemyrtle-bark-scale/monitoring/>. An infested crapemyrtle can be visually identified by the presence of small—less than 1/8 inch in length—white, scale-like insects on the bark and twigs, especially in bark furrows and crevices. When crushed, these scales exude a pink fluid called hemolymph. Crapemyrtle bark scale feeding results in the production of honeydew, which is the leftover sugary solution from feeding on the plant sap. High infestations can result in black sooty mold on leaves, twigs, branches, trunks, and surfaces below. As of the writing of this publication, all commercially available cultivars (*Lagerstroemia indica*, *L. founiei*, and hybrids) of crapemyrtles appear to be susceptible to the crapemyrtle bark scale, although some cultivars may be slightly less susceptible than others.

## BIOLOGY

Immature crapemyrtle bark scales hatch from eggs and are considered the most mobile stage, often referred to as “crawlers.” Once settled, immature crapemyrtle bark scales start feeding on vascular tissue through the bark. Like other felt scale species, crapemyrtle bark scale

develops a white waxy coat as they mature, eventually fully encapsulating themselves in a protective waxy layer. Females only produce one egg mass, in contrast to mealybug females that can lay multiple egg masses. Dissections of 20 female crapemyrtle bark scales found as many as 250 eggs per egg sac. Males pupate and emerge as winged adults that can disperse via flight.

The mechanism of dispersal of immature crapemyrtle bark scales is not yet well-documented. Similar scale species can travel by wind, by hitching a ride on larger insects, squirrels, or birds, or from the movement of pruned materials or cuttings from infested stock.

Crawler emergence can be monitored on crapemyrtles by wrapping double-sided sticky tape around a branch and counting the numbers by removing the tape and inspecting with a hand lens or microscope (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Crapemyrtle bark scale crawlers trapped on double-sided sticky tape as seen under a microscope. Red arrows point out some of the crawlers.

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