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Rochester Sentinel Article  
Scale Insects

As the climate changes so does nature in our own back yards. This year I have seen scale insects doing more damage than normal to local trees. I cannot definitely point to elevated temperatures but research has shown that scale insect problems in the warmer city environment is worse than in rural settings. It has also been documented that scales are on the increase in a variety of historically measured areas.

Scales are a type of insect that puts a covering over them for protection. They are put into two categories, armored and soft. After an armored scale hatches, it begins to feed then becomes very flat and covered with a clear wax shell. As it continues to grow, it remains beneath its waxy armor. This armor is difficult to penetrate with insecticides. Their color blends in with the tree and few people notice them. But what they do see is a sick looking tree with a loss of leaves, dead branches and poor growth. Examples of these types are oystershell scale, a small gray scale shaped like an oyster shell, that can completely encrust branches.

A common soft scale in our area is the tulip tree scale. Many times, I have someone telling me about their leaking tree. Unfortunately, trees do not leak. What people are experiencing as they sit under their shade trees is a tiny insect sucking juices in one end and expelling it out the other. You might look at it as a manufactured rain, we call it honeydew.

Tulip tree scale looks like a dull orange, third of an inch bump on a branch. Right now, the newly hatched crawlers are looking for a place to make their permanent home. This is when they are susceptible to insecticides. But that 30-foot tree is hard to spray and here is where insecticides that are systemic and move within the tree can be used especially on those young crawlers. The most widely available product for scale control is the insecticide imidacloprid. It is applied as a drench to the ground around the tree trunk.

From what I have seen there is no easy miracle product for scale control and repeated annual applications are needed.

There are numerous scale insects. They each have unique lives and certain plants they prefer to feed on. Other types of scales include cottony maple scale, pine needle scale, euonymus scale and scurfy scale.

So, if someone says your dogwood is looking a little scruffy, they may have made a correct diagnosis.

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