

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Nassau County



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Sooty Mold

Sooty mold is a charcoal black fungus that appears on the upper surface of leaves, twigs, branches and fruits of many deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs. This fungus is not pathogenic to plants, but obtains its nourishment from honeydew. Honeydew is a sweet, clear, sticky substance secreted by insects such as aphids, mealybugs, scales and whiteflies. The honeydew drops from insects to the leaves and twigs. Sooty mold spores (seeds) that stick to the honeydew then have a suitable medium for growth. When spores germinate they send out black fungal strands (roots) that bring about the discoloration. A heavy coat of mold may build up on twigs over a period of years.

On leaves, this coat of mold screens out light and reduces the plant's capacity to produce food. On some trees no obvious damage can be noticed. Shrubs under trees that are heavily infested with honeydew producing insects may be seriously damaged or killed. Azalea, Rhododendron, Pieris, Cotoneaster, Holly, and other low-growing shrubs, growing under shady conditions are susceptible to serious damage.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It employs a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce plant problems. These include using resistant plant varieties, proper plant selection and placement, good aftercare and biological and/or mechanical controls. As a last resort, after all other remedies have been explored, a pesticide* that is least toxic to people and natural predators, can be considered. Prior to using any pesticides, plants should always be monitored for the degree of infestation and a sensible control measure considered.

* A *pesticide* is a substance that kills, or attempts to kill, a particular pest, e.g. ***insecticide, fungicide, herbicide, etc.***

Control

To prevent sooty mold, control insects. The insects involved are small, and may be present in large numbers before the black strands of sooty mold appear. Thus, trees and shrubs should be observed frequently during the growing season for honeydew and insects. An insecticide may be necessary. Submit a proper sample to Cornell Cooperative Extension for identification. If a spray is recommended, follow the dilution recommendations on the insecticide label.

E-2-15 DWM:cms reviewed RT 1/03

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