

Friday's Feature

By

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Check your camellias for tea scale

Camellias have been a part of the southern landscape for almost 200 years. They are native to the Orient and were introduced into the United States near Charleston, South Carolina in 1786. The common name camellia refers to varieties and hybrids of *Camellia japonica* and to the less known varieties of *C. sasanqua* and *C. reticulata*.

Camellias can serve several functions in the landscape including foundation plantings, screens, accent plants, background groupings and hedges. Maximum benefit can be achieved by mass plantings or groupings.

Camellias flower in the fall and winter when their display of colorful blooms is most appreciated. During the remainder of the year their evergreen foliage, interesting shapes and textures, and relatively slow growth make camellias excellent landscape plants.

If you grow camellia or sasanquas in your landscape you're almost certainly going to encounter an insect pest called tea scale. These insects don't look like your typical garden bug so they are oftentimes misdiagnosed.



Tea scales appear as somewhat white, fuzzy material on the back of the leaves. Where the scale is massed on the back of the leaves, the upper surface will show mottled yellowish areas.

A heavy infestation can debilitate the health of the plant because these scales are sucking the sap out of the plant. Infested plants have poor vigor, will not bloom well and may eventually die.

Tea scale is probably the most common and damaging pest of camellias and dwarf burford hollies as well as many other ornamental and fruiting crops. It is also considered a pest of tea, citrus, dogwood, bottlebrush and kumquat here and elsewhere in the world.

Controlling tea scale can be particularly problematic because they infest the underside of the leaf. This increases the difficulty of hitting them with an insecticidal spray. They are also difficult to control due to their continuous reproductive cycle and their waxy, protective covering.

For camellias, pruning is an effective way to provide for better coverage of chemical sprays and increase air circulation. Small non-flowering branches growing on major limbs within the interior of the plant should be pruned after flowering.

Tea scale will usually not go away by itself. Oil sprays are effective in controlling tea scale and may be used in fall, winter and spring when temperatures are between 45 and 85 degrees F.

It is essential that thorough coverage of the leaf's under-side is attained. The addition of a sticker-spreader is an effective way to increase coverage. Two to three repeated applications made between seven to ten days apart may be necessary to manage a tea scale infestation.

Prior to making pesticide applications, efforts should be made to insure that a current tea scale infestation is not being naturally managed by native parasites. The use of soaps and oils are preferable to insecticides because they are usually less harmful to the natural predators of tea scale. Follow the manufacturer's labeled rate for any product applied to control a pest.

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