

SCALE INSECTS

Scale insects derive their name from the scale or shell-like outer covering of the adult female. Females are either ‘armored’ that is covered with a convex shell of wax or “unarmored” that is covered by a leathery hard body wall. Most of these insects appear as bumps on the stems or leaves. The protective shell can be very small or quite large.

Females do not move about but live, feed and either lay eggs or give birth to live crawlers all under their shell.

Crawlers are the mobile young, born under their mother’s shell. It is during this stage that most scale species are dispersed. They may walk about on the plant, be blown by the wind, or be accidentally carried about by humans, animals, birds or other insects. Once they find a suitable spot on the plant, they begin to develop their shell. Crawlers are hard to see, but appear as light brown soft bumps on leaves and stems of plants.

Outdoors, scale insects overwinter as eggs under a shell. The eggs require 2 months to develop from egg to adult and there is only one generation per year. In greenhouses or homes, several generations can be produced in a year.

Control- outside there are many natural enemies (mostly other insects) which play a major role in controlling scale insect populations and preventing scale insects from causing significant plant damage. Cultural controls may include repeated spraying with insecticidal soap when the crawlers are active. Dormant oils may be applied before bud break in the spring on outside plants. Other insecticides are registered but are only effective if applied when the crawlers are active. **Note the old dead shells may take years to fall off, so a large number of shells may not mean you still have a major infestation.** Shells on new growth each year indicate the population is growing.

Inside the most effective way to control scale insect is repeated regular spraying with insecticidal soap. The soap solution will kill the crawlers, but will not harm the adults under the shells.