



Kramer Tree Specialists, Inc. - "Complete Professional Tree Care"

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Aphids

Aphids collectively feed on a wide range of woody plants. Conifers as well as deciduous trees can be affected. Several species exist, with a wide range of life cycles. Aphids may be green, black, brown, red, pink, or another color, depending on the sap color of the host plant. They are usually slow-moving insects with somewhat pear-shaped bodies, ranging in size from 1/16 - 1/8" long.

Symptoms

Aphids may only cause minor damage as they feed by thrusting a long beak into plant tissue and sucking out the fluids. As a result, leaves and needles of plants may be distorted or curled, succulent stems may wilt, or growth may be stunted. Damage caused by aphids feeding on the bark of woody trees or shrubs cannot easily be seen especially on well established plantings. The presence of "honeydew" excreted by aphids (due to the great quantities of sap they withdraw from plants) can be a nuisance. Sidewalks, lawn furniture, and automobiles may become wet and sticky with the honeydew. A sooty mold can develop over the honeydew, blackening stems and foliage. Honeydew also attracts stinging insects.

Life Cycle

The aphid life cycle is complex and involves several generations of wingless females which reproduce without mating. The female aphid will produce live offspring, followed by a generation of winged females, while bearing a sexually reproducing, egg-laying generation of males and females. Mating usually occurs in fall and eggs are laid in crevices of the twigs of the host plant. A first generation of wingless females hatches in spring. Different host plants and different parts of the plant may be used at different stages of the aphid life cycle.

Management

Imidacloprid soil injections around the base of the tree offer protection. The more consecutive annual applications made, the higher the level of protection. Horticultural oil spray applications made in the dormant season can be effective against aphids that overwinter as eggs on trees. After the discovery of aphids, insecticidal sprays may be necessary. These need to be applied before significant leaf distortion has taken place. Outbreaks of spider mites can occur later in the season as a result of this spray. In the Midwest, many natural enemies of aphids are present. These include lady beetles, flower flies, lacewings, parasitic wasps, and several fungal diseases. Delaying systemic insecticide spray applications until the beneficial populations have had a chance to increase may eliminate the need to spray. Inspect your trees regularly for aphids as new populations can fly in all summer long. Keep trees well watered and fertilized to promote overall good health, which alleviates stress and prevents pests from attacking. Avoid excess fertilization as shoot growth prolongs aphid infestation.

