

Pyriform scale (*Protopulvinaria pyriformis*)



An active infestation of pyriform scale adults and nymphs on an umbrella tree. The black smudges on the variegated arbutus (right) are caused by a sooty mold.

If your “arbutos”, umbrella trees, fatsias, Hedera ivy or gardenias have a black-looking, sooty appearance, flip the leaves over and look for scale pests, such as the pyriform scale. This soft scale species excretes large quantities of ingested plant sap. This bug waste has a more socially acceptable name of “honeydew” amongst plant people. The honeydew is rich in plant sugars that the scale insect doesn’t utilize. When the honeydew accumulates on the foliage, an opportunistic fungus soon colonizes what the scale insect squirts out.

This scale has a rather unique, squashed pear appearance. The adult scales are about 1/10 of an inch both in length and also at their widest point. Adults are a light greenish brown to tan or reddish brown surrounded by a white cottony fringe. The nymphs or immature scales are a translucent greenish color.

Damage can result in poor vigor and eventually, defoliation. There are repeating generations of this sucking pest during the year, so careful monitoring of plants is required to avoid scale population build-up.

What to do: For immediate results either pluck infested leaves or if a heavy infestation is active use a pesticide. Try a 2% horticultural (paraffinic mineral) oil solution when the smaller stages are present. Spray the undersides of the leaves thoroughly. Repeat at monthly intervals until pest is gone. The oil will also dry up the sooty mold and cause it to flake off. Try a long-term strategy and use a new soil drench systemic insecticide (root absorbed and translocated to the leaves). It is slower acting and it may take 4 weeks or longer to move into shrub’s foliage. The product is called Bayer Advanced Garden™ Tree and Shrub Insect Control (imidacloprid). This product is safer to use than earlier systemics and has the advantage of prolonged protection, maybe 4 to 12 months.

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