

Pink Hibiscus Mealy Bug

This Pink Hibiscus Mealybug, *Maconellicoccus hirsutus*, also called the Pink or Grape Mealybug, is considered a very serious pest in both tropical and subtropical areas, is about 3mm, or one-eighth of an inch long.



Mealybugs are small pink colored insects, but will appear white as adults because they are covered with a white, waxy discharge which they use for protection (thus the term “mealy”). They ooze honeydew, which increases the production of a type of mold which is black and sooty in appearance and will be visible on the leaves of the host plant. The body fluids of this insect are pink, which can be seen when insects are flattened. Females feed on plant sap and lay orange colored egg sacs that turn pink when they are ready to hatch. Once hatched, they are called nymphs, and search for appropriate plants upon which to forage. The Pink Hibiscus Mealybug can produce up to fifteen generations annually, and can lay up to 600 eggs. The entire life cycle can take up to 30 days.

These pests present a large potential problem to numerous Citrus, fruit bearing and vegetable crops, as well as forest trees and ornamentals such as Hibiscus, Bougainvillea, Croton, Heliconias, Ixora, Palms, Oleanders, Anthuriums and Ginger lilies.

This pest is found on plants from stems to roots because it does not attack any one particular part of plants. On plants other than Hibiscus, weakened or seedling trees are more prone to infestation. On Hibiscus, it can be found primarily on young twigs, causing terminal growth deformities. The Hibiscus Pink Mealybug injects toxic saliva while feeding on the yielding tissue of many which may result in the following:

- Stunted development of fruit and or buds
- Thickening of stems
- Curling of new shoots and or leaves
- Unopened leaves that appear bunched up
- Stunted flowers with no growth
- White fluffy mass on buds, stems, fruit and or roots

The key to control is sanitation in pruning and maintenance work and the removal the infested plant material off site. Systemic insecticides can be effective but are slow to act. For images of this insect and the damage it causes, please go to:

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=pink%20hibiscus%20mealybug%20damage&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=wi>

During the November 2008 Inspection by OLM in conjunction with ValleyCrest, our landscaping company here in Kings Point, Pink Hibiscus Mealybugs were found on an existing Hibiscus in Portsmouth, which was then controlled by ValleyCrest under OLM’s direction.

The information for this article was provided by the University of Florida IFAS Extension office, Paul G. Woods of OLM, John Cornelius of ValleyCrest and Stormy Holloway of Sterling Management Services.