

Guidance note

Controlling mealybugs and scale insects



Root mealybug



Jacaranda bug



Australia bug

Mealybugs are small fluffy white insects, while scale insects look like small brown scales, the insect body is hidden below. They feed by inserting their needle like mouthparts into the plant and sucking sap, and can be found fixed to the stems or underside of leaves.

There are a number of different species of mealybug and scale insect on St Helena, each one preferring a different group of plants. The commonest mealybugs are root mealybug, Australia bug and Jacaranda bug.

Signs to look out for:

- White fluffy looking material (mealybug) or brown scales (scale insects) just about anywhere on the plant
- Large white insects on the stems or leaf veins (Australia bug, Jacaranda bug).
- Black mould on the upper side of leaves, the whole plant can look blackened. The mould is not itself a pest, it grows on the sugary droppings of mealybugs.
- The plant looks weak and ailing but otherwise clean; white fluffy looking material around the base of the stem and in the roots (root mealybug). In advanced infestations the mealybugs leave the roots and can be found on the stem on the leaves.



Scale insects

Affects:

- Many flowers and shrubs, fruit trees, crops and endemic plants.
- Endemic gumwood trees are very vulnerable to Jacaranda bug.

Management:

Scout plants regularly, at least once a week and preferably more often, to check for signs of any problems. Treat when insects are first seen:

- For light infestations of a few plants, rub the white fluffy insects off with your fingers.
- Spray the affected plants with a solution of soapy water every 3 days, using a large squirt of soft soap such as Fairy Liquid in 1l of water.
- A systemic insecticide such as Aphicide (active ingredient dimethoate): spray the recommended rate at 14 day intervals for up to 3 sprays per crop.
- For root mealybug, spot spray the stem base and around the soil of affected plants with malathion at the recommended rate (active ingredient mercaptothion). A single treatment is usually sufficient.

There is no need to treat the black mould (also called sooty mould), it will disappear when the insects do.

Biological control:

Three ladybirds have been introduced as biological control agents for mealybugs, one which attacks mealybugs in general, one specific to the Australia bug and one specific to the Jacaranda bug.

These give good control overall, generally small pockets of the pest become locally abundant before the ladybird finds them and slowly brings them under control. For the Jacaranda bug, numbers tend to be highest at the end of the summer, and then lowest in early spring.

Spraying with dimethoate or malathion will kill the biological control agents very quickly and should be used only when considered absolutely necessary to save infested plants. Where possible, soapy water sprays and hand removal are recommended.

For further advice please contact Farmer Support at ANRD on 24724.

