

Scale, Ants and Mould

If you notice that some of the trunks or stems of a plant are becoming black with sooty-looking mould, here is what is happening to them...

THE INSECTS - Your plant is being attacked by sap-sucking insects. These can be scale insects, leafhoppers, lerp, or aphids. These little critters suck the sap from the leaves of your plant.

THE ANTS – you will notice a number of ants climbing up and down the trunk of the plant. These ants have a little deal going with the insects. The insects give them a drop of honey dew in return for the insects' protection from predators such as birds.

THE SOOTY MOULD – these ants, whilst transporting the dew down the trunk, often smear it on the trunk of the plant. This sticky substance grows 'sooty mould' on the plant.

THE REASON – this occurs seasonally, or when the plant is stressed or unhealthy.

The Solution

1. Find the pest causing the problem. Follow the ants and find the insects that they are surrounding.
2. Get rid of the ants. Shake them off the plant. Smear Vaseline on the trunk of the plant to prevent ants from returning to protect the insects. Little native birds such as Silvereyes adore eating the unprotected insects!

SCALE insects are covered by a white, brown or black cap. If the infestation is small, just put on a pair of gloves and rub them off. The brown sticky fluid is the sap they are sucking from your plant. If the infestation is large, spray with white oil to suffocate the scale insects. Do not spray on a hot day, as it will burn the leaves.

APHIDS are usually little green or brown crawlies, and form clusters together on soft new leaves to suck the sap from them. Prune them off, and keep an eye out for re-infestations. If you're not winning the war on aphids, use a pest oil spray.

LERPS are usually covered with a thin brown or green cover, and the effects of their attack are often discovered long before the pest is found. Squash them as soon as discovered.

LEAFHOPPERS are little winged creatures, often green or brown, and are much bigger than scale insects. These are difficult to control, as they are highly mobile.

If you see sooty mould on your plants but cannot see any ants, the insect has probably done the damage and gone! There is no reliable method for preventing further attacks, so just keep an eye out for ant activity, particularly on unhappy or stressed plants around summer and autumn.