

## Coastal Gardener Column

Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

August 9, 2007

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### COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

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**Q:** My willow tree has leaves which have reddish-yellow, oblong, blister-like growths. The growths (galls) are scattered over the tree. What causes this malady, and should I be concerned for the health of my tree?

**A:** The galls are caused by the feeding activity of the larval stage of the willow leaf gall sawfly. Sawflies are members of the wasp family. The adult sawfly is about ¼ inch long and black. The female lays her eggs singly in the leaf. As the larvae begin to feed, it stimulates rapid cell division, and the production of the galls you see on your willow. Willow leaf galls and the sawfly that causes them are found throughout the western United States wherever willows are present. The galls do very little injury to the host plant, and there is no need to control this wasp.

**Q:** My oleander is badly infested with a dark brown to near black scale insect. The scale is shaped like a turtle shell. There are also ridges on the shell. Please identify the scale and suggest a control.

**A:** The scale insect is “black scale” (*Saissetia oleae*). My references state that black scale “is by far the most important member of the entire order (of scale insects).” Black scale can and does infest numerous hosts from almonds to watermelons and everything in between. Identification of this scale is fairly easy. Many of the young scales have “H” shaped ridges on their shell. The ridges tend to flatten out as the scales mature. When populations are high, the scales can suck enough sap from their host to cause the plant to go into a decline. Shoot growth is reduced, leaves may turn yellow and drop early. There may also be excessive amounts of honeydew and sooty mold present on the infested parts of the plant. Ant activity may also be seen as the ants protect the scale and gather the honeydew that the scales produce.

Black scale has a number of natural parasites and predators that will keep populations of the scale in check. However, to allow the parasites and predators to do their work, the ants must be controlled. As long as ants are guarding the scale, predators and parasites will not be effective in suppressing the population.

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Black scale can be controlled by applying a narrow range oil (summer oil) to the host plant. Use the amount recommended on the product label and spray to get complete coverage of all plant surfaces. Summer oil acts by coating the scale and suffocating it. Hence, thorough coverage is important to good control. Also pay some attention to ant control. Ants will reintroduce the scale to your oleander and other shrubs in your yard if they are not kept in check.

One final note. Black scale is only one member of the family of soft scales that infest plants on the Central Coast. Other species in this group include hemispherical scale, irregular scale, oak lecanium scale, calico scale, soft brown scale and citricola scale – to name a few. All these scales can be controlled by applying summer oil to the infested plant(s). Imidacloprid and acephate are also effective control chemicals.

Use all plant protection products according to package label instructions for best results.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**