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Unwelcome Winter Insect Guests

An insect that can become an unwelcome winter guest are mealybugs. Mealybugs are in the Family Pseudococcidae, and their bodies are covered with white waxy powder, forming fringes around their bodies.

Mealybugs feed on a wide range of host plants. There are generally two types of mealybugs commonly found, the longtailed mealybug and the citrus mealybug. Longtailed mealybugs, *Pseudococcus longispinus*, can be identified by two long wax tails extending from the end of the adult females' and mature nymphs' abdomens, and their long wax fringes found around the perimeter of the body. The citrus mealybugs (*Planococcus citri*) do not have tails and have short wax fringes around the perimeter of their bodies.

Mealybugs damage plants by inserting their piercing-sucking mouthparts into plant tissue. They usually do not cause significant injury when low populations are present. However a large population of mealybugs can cause leaves to yellow, curl, and drop. Mealybugs also produce large amounts of honeydew which can coat plants. This honeydew is a perfect growth media for sooty mold, which can prevent leaves from adequate photosynthesis.

Some Options for Control:

Inspect: check under leaves and within leaf folds for egg masses, crawlers, honeydew and sooty mold.

Sanitize by cleaning pots to remove egg masses and/or crawlers. Also, remove infested parts of plants immediately.

Biological Control. Ongoing releases of beneficial insects, such as the mealybug destroyer ladybeetle, *Cryptolaemus montrouzieri*, can help prevent mealybugs from reaching outbreak levels.

Physical Control. If a few mealybugs are present, they can be removed with rubbing alcohol. The rubbing alcohol can be placed on a cotton ball and then rubbed onto the mealybug for removal. Also water can be used to spray mealybugs off leaves.

Chemical Control. Insecticidal soaps and horticultural oils are most effective if they are applied underneath leaves, and in areas where crawlers could move. Also systemics, such as products containing the active ingredient imidacloprid can be used.



Citrus mealybug. Photo by Texas A&M University, Entomology Department.

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