

# SOOTY MOLD

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## Q: What is Sooty Mold?

A: Sooty Mold, caused by *Capnodium* sp., is the result of a non plant pathogenic fungus that grows superficially as a thin black layer on leaves, fruit, twigs and stems of various crop plants or trees (Figs. 1-3). This fungus grows on the honeydew produced by insects with piercing-sucking mouthparts. The insects, including aphids (Fig. 4), mealy bugs (Fig. 5), scales (Fig. 7), and whiteflies (Fig. 6), pierce the plant tissue with their stylets and suck cell sap. Continuous sucking of cell sap leads to greater quantities of fluid in the insect body, which is much more than the retaining capacity of insects. Insects cope with this problem by excreting excessive amounts of liquid from their body in the form of a sugary substance called 'honeydew'.

## Q: How does Sooty Mold affect plants?

A: Sooty Mold does not directly affect the plant, but it can inhibit the



Fig. 1. Sooty Mold infestation on citrus leaves, twigs, and fruit (Photo credit: Texas A&M Horticulture program)



Fig. 2. Sooty Mold infestation on crape myrtle (Photo credit: Mississippi State University Extension Services)

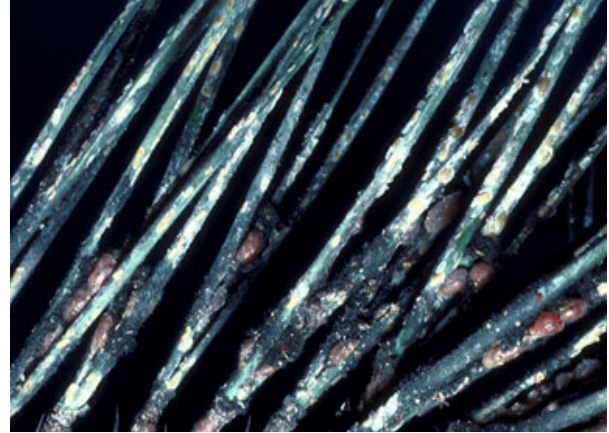
photosynthetic ability of the plant by covering leaves, twigs, fruit, and stems. Under extreme conditions plants with Sooty Mold may lose vigor and be predisposed to other plant pathogens. Plant growth may also be retarded and yields can be significantly reduced. The aesthetic value of the plant covered with sooty mold is greatly reduced.

**Q: What plant species are affected by Sooty Mold?**

A: Any plant species that is a host for insects with piercing and sucking type of feeding may be affected with Sooty Mold. Hedges, small bushes or other plants planted under large trees may get Sooty Mold if the large trees are infested with sucking insects. This happens when the honeydew from insects high in the canopy of large trees falls on the vegetation underneath.

**Q: How is Sooty Mold controlled?**

A: Managing Sooty Mold is very simple. Keep insects, such as aphids, mealy bugs, scales, and whiteflies, in check. Once the insect problem is solved there will be no new Sooty Mold infestation. The previous Sooty Mold infestation will dry out after sometime and easily sloughs off the infested areas. Pressurized water can be used to wash off the Sooty Mold. Care should be taken while using pressurized water because it may damage the plant parts.



*Fig. 3. Sooty Mold on loblolly pine caused by the pine tortoise scales (Photo credit: R. Scott Cameron, International Paper, Bugwood.org)*



*Fig. 4. Aphid nymphs and adults (Photo credit: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org)*



*Fig. 5. Mealy bug eggs, nymphs, and adults (Jeffrey W. Lotz, Florida Department of Agriculture, Bugwood.org)*

**Q: How are insect infestations managed?**

**A:** Insect infestations are generally controlled with insecticides or horticultural oils. Before applying any kind of chemical pesticide, it is very important to identify the insect properly. Samples of plants infested with insect pests may be taken to your County Extension Agent for identification. LSU AgCenter's Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic is also available to diagnose insect pest problems.

[For further information on Sooty Mold please contact:](#)

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*Fig. 6. Whiteflies (Central Science Laboratory, Harpenden Archive, British Crown, Bugwood.org)*



*Fig. 7. Scale insects (United States National Collection of Scale Insects Photographs Archive, USDA ARS, Bugwood.org)*

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