

Pink Hibiscus Mealybug Pest Alert

Pink Hibiscus Mealybug, *Maconellicoccus hirsutus*



[Lance Osborne](#), University of Florida

The Pink Hibiscus Mealybug was recently detected at separate homes in Harris and Brazoria counties. In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, TDA collected 20 suspect mealybug samples from approximately two square miles surrounding the Pearland home. Of these 20 samples, six were confirmed as the pink hibiscus mealybug. TDA will initiate a similar survey around the southwest Houston home where the other mealy bug was detected to determine the extent of infestation.

Inspectors have initiated control measures using biological control. They are releasing parasitic wasps at all locations where the pink hibiscus mealy bugs were found. Research has shown these parasitic insects are the best method to control mealybugs, resulting in approximately 90 percent success rate. The tiny wasps will only attack the mealybugs, not humans or pets. Upon release, the wasps lay eggs inside the mealybugs and as they grow, the mealybugs die. As wasps multiply, they spread in search of additional mealybugs. A successful mealy bug control requires several months.

The pink hibiscus mealybug is a serious economic threat to agriculture, forestry, and the nursery industry. This pest attacks many plants, trees, and shrubs. For example, it infests hibiscus, citrus, coffee, sugar cane, annonas, plums, guava, mango, okra, sorrel, teak, mora, pigeon pea, peanut, grape, maize, asparagus, chrysanthemum, beans, cotton, soybean, and cocoa, just to name a few of its hosts. Host plants extend to 76 families and over 200 genera.

“Bunchy Top”



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

As it feeds, using a piercing and sucking process, the pink hibiscus mealybug injects into the plant a toxic saliva that results in malformed leaf and shoot growth, stunting, and, occasionally, death. Leaves show a characteristic curling, similar to damage caused by viruses. Heavily infested plants have shortened internodes leading to a “bunchy top” appearance. A heavy, black, sooty mold may develop on an infested plant's leaves and stems as a result of the mealybug's heavy honey-dew secretions. When fruits are infested, they can be entirely covered with the white, waxy coating of the mealybug. Infestation can lead to fruit drop, or fruit may remain on the host in a dried and shriveled condition. If flower blossoms are attacked, the fruit sets poorly.

Nurseries and garden stores should ensure that plants they offer for sale are free of pests, especially the pink hibiscus mealybug. If you have a mealybug infestation, use the information provided at the following [web link](#) to rule out common mealybug species. If you suspect the mealybug to be pink hibiscus mealybug, contact your [Texas AgriLife Extension Service agent](#) to determine if a sample is necessary for identification and confirmation.

Additional information on the pink hibiscus mealybug can be found at the following weblinks:

[USDA/APHIS](#)

[Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#)

Press Releases:

[July 16, 2008](#)

[September 17, 2007](#)

To reach the Texas Department of Agriculture, please call:

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