

Pink Hibiscus Mealybug (*Maconellicoccus hirsutus*)

Introduced: 2002 (Broward County)

Current Infestation: Pink hibiscus mealybug has been found in more than 30 counties throughout Florida.

Description/Biology: The life cycle of the pink hibiscus mealybug (PHM) is about 23-30 days. Females can lay up to 600 eggs. Eggs are laid in a loosely woven white egg sac. The eggs are initially orange

and then become pink before hatching.

Newly hatched nymphs

can walk considerable distances or be picked up by wind currents and blown to new feeding sites.



Adult female mealybugs are about 1/8 inch long (3 mm), body color is pink and covered with a white, waxy secretion.



A few other mealybug species look similar to PHM, however they usually do not cause severe plant responses. Commercial growers should consult an entomologist if PHM is suspected.

Seasonality: PHM can be found year-round in southern Florida.

Hosts: Numerous tropical and subtropical fruits, vegetables, ornamental plants, and tropical forest trees.

Examples include hibiscus, citrus, sugar cane, annonas, guava, mango, okra, sorrel, pigeon pea, peanut, grape vines, corn, chrysanthemum, beans, cotton, soybean, and many other plants.

Hibiscus appears to be the preferred host.

Importance: This mealybug has devastated agricultural crops in many parts of the world. It can kill plants and has the potential to be easily spread to new locations.

Damage: The mealybug forms colonies on the host plant which can grow into large masses of white, waxy deposits on branches, flower buds, fruits, leaves, and whole plants. Mealybug feeding results in malformed leaf and shoot growth, stunting, and occasionally death.



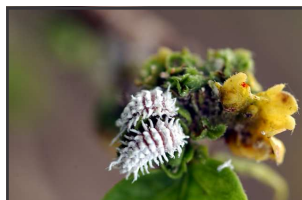
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Management: Biological control offers the safest, most economical and long term solution to PHM in non-commercial areas. Parasitic wasps are being released into infested areas through the efforts of State and Federal agencies. These parasites are established and contribute to the control of this pest. These tiny wasps do not attack plants, Animals, or people.



A predatory lady beetle, the mealybug destroyer (*Cryptolaemus montrouzieri*), is also commonly found feeding on PHM. Beetle larvae actually resemble mealybugs, but are generally larger and move faster.



Homeowner - To reduce PHM, you can remove infested plant parts, place them into plastic bags, and discard so not to infest other plants. Many insecticides will kill natural enemies that come in contact with the sprayed plant. Insecticidal soaps or oils are less harmful to natural enemies. The use of imidacloprid (Bayer Advanced Tree & Shrub) may help

control this pest and not have a negative impact on these beneficial insects.

Professional and Growers - If you are in an infested area, you should employ good sanitation, scouting and prevention methods. Isolate newly acquired plants until you are sure they do not have PHM. Consider a preventative spray program in infested areas with high risk crops such as hibiscus. Preventative treatments include foliar applications of bifenthrin (ie. Talstar), acephate (ie. Orthene), chlorpyrifos (ie. DuraGuard ME), pyriproxyfen (Distance), buprofezin (Talus), neonicotinoids (ie. Flagship, Marathon, Discus, Safari, TriStar), horticultural oils, and insecticidal soaps. For the landscape, product choices may include Merit and Allectus. If a nursery or stock dealer is found to be infested with PHM, it may be placed under quarantine. Destruction and/or pesticide treatment are necessary to be released from quarantine.

Websites:

<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/press/2002/06202002.html>

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/pubs/phmpaler.pdf>

<http://www.mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/lso/mealybugs.htm>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN156>

Authors:

Adrian Hunsberger, UF/IFAS, Miami-Dade Extension
Kim Gabel, UF/IFAS, Monroe Extension
Catharine Mannion, UF/IFAS, TREC Homestead
Eileen Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville
Lyle Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville

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