

Azalea Whitefly

NC STATE EXTENSION

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Description and Biology

Azalea whiteflies, *Pealius azaleae*, are tiny, snow-white insects that resemble tiny, snow-white moths about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch long. Females insert their eggs just into the lower surface of azalea leaves. From the eggs hatch minute, yellowish crawlers that resemble motile pollen grains. Eventually the crawlers insert their threadlike mouthparts into the leaf and begin to suck sap. Crawlers molt into pale, scale-like insects called nymphs that also suck sap. Mature nymphs are light yellow to orange. Crawlers and nymphs as well as adults excrete honeydew, a clear sweet liquid. Fungi called sooty molds grow in the honeydew and cause infested azaleas to become dark - sometimes almost black! Sooty molds may damage the shrub by literally blocking sunlight from the leaves and shading the plant out.



Azalea whiteflies usually are found on the lower surface of azalea leaves.

Photo by J. R. Baker, NC State University

Azalea whiteflies are resemble tiny, snow-white moths.



An azalea whitefly with a nymph (black arrow) and an egg (green arrow).

Photo by J. R. Baker, NC State University

Azalea whitefly eggs are inserted into the lower leaf surface.



Azalea whitefly mature nymphs (pupae) that have been parasitized by a tiny encyrtid wasp. An adult wasp has emerged from the upper pupa. Note the azalea whitefly eggs (arrows).

Photo by J. R. Baker, NC State University

Azalea whitefly nymphs are often plagued by tiny encyrtid wasps.

Host Plants

Azalea whiteflies infest all cultivars of azaleas. Infested plants become unthrifty, and honeydew and sooty molds further detract from a healthy appearance. Clouds of adults may fly up whenever heavily infested plants are disturbed.

Residential Recommendations

For control of azalea whiteflies, one of the horticultural oils should be moderately effective as well as helping to weather away sooty molds clinging to the shrubs long after the whiteflies are gone. One thorough treatment in the fall and another in the spring after new growth emerges should greatly

reduce azalea whiteflies although infested shrubs can be treated any time that the whiteflies are first noted (except when azaleas have brand new, tender foliage. This warning also applies to soaps, pyrethroids, and imidacloprid -- insecticides also labeled for whitefly control in residential landscapes.).

References

- [Insect and related Pests of Flowers and Foliage Plants](#). Baker, J. R., ed. 1994. NC Coop. Extension Service Pub. AG-136. 106 pp.
- [Sooty Molds](#). Frank, S. D., S. B. Bambara and R. K. Jones. 2002 revised. Entomology Insect Notes, NC State Extension Publications.
- [Extension Plant Pathology Publications and Factsheets](#)
- [Horticultural Science Publications](#)
- [North Carolina Agricultural Chemicals Manual](#)

For assistance with a specific problem, contact [your local Cooperative Extension Center](#)

This Factsheet has not been peer reviewed.

Author

James Baker

Professor Emeritus Entomology and Plant Pathology

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