

# Sooty Mold

By Cynthia Ash  
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Frequently tree limbs and leaves are covered by an unsightly, black, sooty growth called sooty mold. It may occur on any tree or shrub but is most common on pine, elm and linden (basswood).

Sooty mold is a fungus but is not considered to be a disease. It lives saprophytically; that is, it does not infect living plant tissue. The sooty mold fungus is often found on plants infested with sapsucking insects such as aphids, white flies or scales which produce a sugary secretion called honeydew. This honeydew drips down onto leaves and branches, providing a food base on which the sooty mold fungi can grow. Sooty mold may also grow on sap or resin associated with wounds.

Heavy growth by the fungus can reduce photosynthesis but does not harm the plant in any other way. We do not recommend control of the mold itself; however, the presence of the sooty mold is often an indication of insect activity which has the potential for causing damage. Proper identification of the insect is necessary to determine if chemical control is warranted. Light coverings of the mold will gradually disappear when its nutrient source is eliminated and during dry weather. Sooty mold can be physically washed off small plants if desired.

Sooty mold may be unsightly but seldom causes injury to the host plant. It may signal an insect infestation; however, proper identification of the insect is necessary to determine if and when chemical treatment is warranted.

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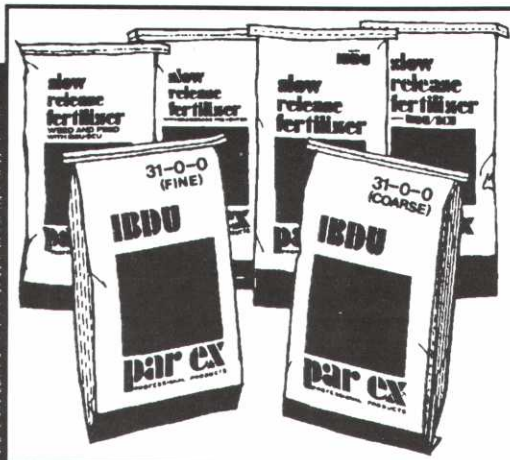
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