

## *Gloomy Scale on Maple* *Identification, Biology and Management*

Scales insects are an unusual group that look and behave very differently than most insect pests encountered on trees. Scale adults are small, immobile insects that live beneath a hard or soft waxy shell that is secreted by the insect. They have no visible legs, wings or antennae. Scales feed on plant sap by inserting a straw like stylet into plant cells and removing the contents. Heavy scale infestations will stunt growth, reduce vitality and lead to branch dieback and decline. There are hundreds of species of scales that damage landscape plants.

Gloomy scale, (*Melanaspis tenebricosus*) is a particularly widespread and damaging scale on red, silver and Freeman maples. It is an armored scale in which the insect secretes a hard covering that is approximately a 1/8" diameter, grey shell that blends into the bark and often goes unnoticed until infestations become quite heavy. Gloomy scale spends the winter beneath the protective covering on the bark. In spring, it completes development and begins to lay eggs beneath the shell. Eggs hatch in late May and June and the immatures (nymphs), which are commonly referred to as "crawlers" because they have legs, will disperse to other portions of the plant. Once crawlers settle and begin to feed, they produce the hard waxy covering that will protect the insect. These crawlers will complete development in late summer and produce a second generation.



**Figure 2: Declining red maple from gloomy scale**



**Gloomy scale**

**Management:** Horticultural oil applied in the dormant season will reduce the overwintering population of the pest and help to prevent light infestations from becoming damaging. Where infestations have approached damaging levels, insecticides must be applied during the crawler stage when the insect is vulnerable. Once the immature produces the waxy covering, insecticide sprays are not effective.