



## FYN Garden Q & A Series

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### FYN TOPIC: Croton Scale

**Question:** I have four crotons that are losing their leaves and look like they are dying. The undersides of the leaves are covered with a grayish white scale which I can easily remove with my fingernail. What is it and what can I do about it? Bernadette K.

**Answer:** You are probably correct in your diagnosis. Crotons are scale magnets. Many types of soft and hard scale pests feed on crotons, produce honeydew and blacken the plants with sooty mold. Croton scale and mealybugs are most common. Your scale problem is likely croton scale which also affects many tropical plants like copperleaf, Cuban laurel, carambola, guava, longan, mango and soursop and even a few natives like gumbo limbo, Simpson's stopper, Bahama wild coffee and sea grape.

Crotons often survive a mild scale attack without chemical controls. But, a bad infestation like you describe will lead to plant dieback or death. To treat a scale problem contained on just a few stems and leaves, wash the affected area with a soft cloth soaked in warm soapy water, then rinse. Keep a close watch for re-infestation and repeat the treatment as needed. Be sure to inspect all plant parts closely. Ants feeding on the scale's sticky honeydew will alert you the pest has returned. Conserve natural enemies you see attacking the scale pest. Gardeners confuse beneficial predators and parasites as just another pest. Cryptoleamus, also known as the mealybug destroyer, needs to be conserved. Other scale attackers include: metaphycus flavus, a tiny fly and several invisible parasites.

Many are commercially available. Insecticides used for controlling scales include soap (M-pede, Safer's soap), dysulfoton (Bayer Advanced Garden, two-in-one), imidacloprid (Bayer Advanced Garden Tree & Shrub Insect Control) and permethrin (Spectracide Rose & Flower Insect Control).

#### Useful Links

<http://www.floridayards.org>

<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>

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

<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>



Cryptoleamus, the beneficial predator (Photo: Stephen Brown)



Croton scale female (Photo: Lyle Buss, UF)

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 239-533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. or by emailing [Extgardener@leegov.com](mailto:Extgardener@leegov.com). Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>





