For the third consecutive autumn, the Asian cycad scale \((Aulacapis yasumatsui)\) is attacking the sago palms of Central Bonda in great numbers. The Asian cycad scale is a small, white, stationary insect that sucks the juices out of the plant, causing discoloration of the leaves, growth of sooty mold, and eventually death of the sago, if not treated.

This particular scale insect, accidentally introduced to the United States from Thailand, was discovered in Miami in 1996. Unfortunately, it has been spreading throughout Florida ever since. Asian cycad scale is an invasive exotic pest, which attacks members of the cycad family. The scale is called "exotic" because it is not native to Florida and is not controlled by natural predators. Without them, the scale reproduces rapidly, causing it to become invasive.

Scale insects begin their lives in a crawler stage, in which they crawl around the plant until they find a suitable spot to feed. They insert their stylet into the plant and begin feeding. Soon afterwards, they create a protective covering over themselves where they will remain stationary until they die.

Asian cycad scale comes in two shapes and sizes. If you look closely at an infested sago palm, you will see the differences. The males are narrow, rod-shaped and smaller. The females are round, mound-shaped and much larger.

This species of scale can be harder to control than other scale species because of its rare characteristics. It is unusual in that it can infest the roots of the plants as well as the leaves and stems. Crawlers have been found anywhere from between 6 and 24 inches below the soil surface. Asian cycad scale also can be easily spread by wind, which means that during the hurricanes, this probably spread quite a distance.

The most effective control for the Asian cycad scale is to use a horticultural oil (Ultrafine, summer oil, volek oil, dormant oil, etc) spray or Malathion-in-oil spray, available at garden centers. Cycads should be treated with the oil every other week until the pest is eradicated. It is important to spray the plant thoroughly, including the underside of the leaves. Any gaps in coverage will allow the scale population to rebound. Follow directions on the insecticide label.

It is possible, however, to have killed the scale and for it to remain on the plant. Strong streams of water from your garden hose will loosen the dead scale and wash them off. It may take a number of applications to control the pest. The most important thing to remember is to treat affected plants in a consistent and effective manner.

In severe cases, you may use a systemic insecticide, which is used as a soil drench and taken through the system of the plant via the roots. Systemic insecticides, such as those with the active ingredients acephate, dimethoate, disyston and imidacloprid, move into the sap system of the plant. The insects are then poisoned when they feed on the sap of the plant.

Research shows that imidacloprid is not very effective on Asian cycad scale. Systemics also interfere with beneficial insects, therefore, they should only be used on a limited basis. A new and effective treatment option is an insect growth regulator called Distance. Because of it's high cost, it's primarily a commercial product.

Because of the time and cost involved in eliminating this devastating pest, one needs to consider if all the work is worth it. It may be easier and more cost effective to remove the sago palm and replant with
something else that has a similar look to the sago palm, but not affected by the scale.

These plants can include cardboard palms (*Zamia furfuracea*) or pygmy date palms (*Phoenix roebelenii*). Larger sago palms are probably worth the effort. But remember, if you eliminate the scale and your neighbors do not, watch out for a possible reinfestation. Monthly preventive oil treatments should keep your sago palms safe, but there are no guarantees.

Researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture are searching for a natural predator for Asian cycad scale. But for now, we have to do the work ourselves.

For more information on the Asian cycad scale, contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at 321-697-3000. They are available to take your calls Monday through Friday from 10a.m. to 2p.m.

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**Hurricane Cleanup**

Did the hurricanes wreck your landscape? Are you having trouble trying to help your landscape recover after the hurricanes? Come to the free seminar "Landscape Clean-up After the Hurricanes." It will be at Osceola Heritage Park at 2 p.m. Nov. 17 and at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 23. Registration is required. Call (321)697-3000.

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