Southern Red Mite, *Oligonychus ilicis* (McGregor)  
*(Arachnida: Acari: Tetranychidae)*

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**Introduction**

The southern red mite (SRM), *Oligonychus ilicis* (McGregor) is an important spider mite pest of broad-leaved evergreens. Bolland et al. (1998) reported the SRM from seven countries on four continents and feeding on 34 different plant species in 15 families. The SRM is called the coffee red mite in Brazil.

**Synonymy**

*Oligonychus ilicis* (McGregor) was originally described as *Tetranychus ilicis* by McGregor 1917, from American holly (*Ilex opaca*) in South Carolina. McGregor transferred the species to *Paratetranychus* in 1919 and Pritchard and Baker (1955) placed it in *Oligonychus*. The holotype is in the U.S. National Museum.

**Distribution**

The general distribution of the SRM includes the Northern Hemisphere and South America. Although the southern red mite was described in the United States, Pritchard and Baker (1955) suggested it might have originated in the "Far East." Published distribution records includes: Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea, The Netherlands, Paraguay, and the USA. Although *O. ilicis* was reported from Australia (Knihinicki et al. 1999), the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Wildlife reports it as eradicated (Anonymous 2006).
In the United States the southern red mite has been reported from Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Virginia. It is probably widespread on broad-leaved evergreens in the eastern United States.

**Description and Biology**

The adult female is approximately 385 µ (1/50 inch) in length with a rotund-elliptical body. The adult male is approximately 300 µ in length, much less rotund, and narrowed posteriorly. The male aedeagus is shown below. Both sexes are ferruginous to reddish brown, and darker than most red spider mites found on woody ornamentals. It is more translucent towards the front end of the body (Mizell et al. 2002).

**Hosts**

Common hosts are azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.) and camellias (*Camellia japonica*).

Other reported host plants include: boxwood (*Buxus* spp.), tea (*Camellia sinensis*), pecan (*Carya illinoensis*), camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*), summersweet or sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), coffee (*Coffea arabica*), cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* sp.), elaeagnus or silverthorn (*Elaeagnus pungens*), laurel or bay leaf (*Laurus nobilis*), loquat (*Eriobrya japonica*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* spp.), silkoak (*Grevillea robusta*), hibiscus (*Hibiscus* spp.), holley (*Ilex* spp.), English walnut (*Juglans regia*), juniper (*Juniperus* sp.), doghobble (*Leucothoe* sp.), spruce (*Picea* sp.), photinia or red tip (*Photinia* spp.), American
sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), guava (*Psidium guajava*), pyracantha (*Pyracantha coccinea*), pear (*Pyrus communis*), oak (*Quercus sp.*), deer grass or meadow beauty (*Rhexia* sp.), rose apple (*Syzygium jambos = Eugenia*), cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), viburnum (*Viburnum spp.*).

**Economic Importance**

This mite feeds primarily on foliage of woody ornamental plants. It is particularly a pest of azaleas and camellias. It usually attacks the lower leaf surface and as the population increases it will move to the upper surface of the leaves and on to small succulent stems. It injures the leaves causing a graying, stippling or mesophyll collapse, “firing,” and defoliation. The leaves may be distorted if infested occurs when they are young and expanding (Johnson and Lyon 1994).

Southern red mite populations are at their peak during the winter months under mild, humid conditions. These mites can be found year round in the landscape, especially on eleagnus and on shaded or stressed pyracantha. Populations in the nursery usually disappear when the new spring growth develops (Mizell et al.2002).

**Management**

Use a 10X to 15X magnifying glass to examine the undersides of the leaves for the mites, cast skins and their webbing. A quicker method that many employ is to place a sheet of white paper or paper plate beneath the leaves and strike the foliage sharply. If mites are present they will fall onto the white surface where they can be more easily seen and identified than on the green foliage.

For more information see Insect Management Guide for Ornamentals (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ TOPIC_GUIDE_IG_Ornamentals).

[The junior author thanks Dr. R.F. Mizell, UF/IFAS ornamental entomologist, for his review of this updated publication.]

**Selected References**


