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1. TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF MEALY BUG IN FICUS TREES AND HEDGES

This report addresses the current challenges posed by the plague, *Macrohotoma gladiata*, affecting the Ficus hedges and alignment trees of the Mar Menor 1 Golf Resort.

2. MEALY BUG PEST

Macrohotoma gladiata, commonly known as the Mealy Bug, is a native pest that is endemic to the Ficus hedges of the Mar Menor Golf Resort. This pest is most active during the warm spring, summer months and autumn, thriving in the resort's specific environment. It becomes dormant during the winter season, although the colder weather does not eliminate it.

This pest is characterized by its white cottony protective layer, which, when dispersed by the wind, can cover various surfaces, including artificial grass and pool water. While *Macrohotoma gladiata* has no known negative health effects on humans or animals, its presence has become more of a nuisance.



3. DIFFICULTY OF CONTROLLING THE MEALY BUG INFESTATION.

The difficulty of controlling the *Macrohotoma gladiata* is due to several factors as listed below.

- Endemic to the Ficus trees and hedges.
- Thrives in warm and hot weather. In recent years southern Spain, the summers are becoming increasingly longer and hotter and the winters milder. Currently we are experiencing cold nights, but often daytime temperatures are very warm.
- Insecticides allowed in the EU for treating the pest have become more and more restrictive each year and less effective.
- Closed rear gardens. During the trimming season (spring and autumn) we often come across rear gardens that are closed. These hedges therefore remain untreated, providing an island or hot spot that easily extends to the new growth of recently trimmed and treated hedges. Unfortunately, there are many houses which are kept locked during the trimming and treatment schedule, even though some rear gardens are locked throughout the year, making it impossible treat the problem.
- Trimming procedure. Due to the fact that the hedges and trees are trimmed in topiary twice a year, this trimming triggers new growth in the form of little buds

and tender branches that are ideal and attract the mealy bug, this an additional cause of why there are much more insects. Naturalised shape makes more difficult for the insect to settle down and thrive as can be observed on the alignment Ficus trees in Torre Pacheco town.

4. CONTROL MEASURES FOR MACROHOTOMA GLADIATA.

Currently the Resort has implemented a multifaceted approach to control the impact of *Macrophotoma gladiata* on the Ficus hedges.

The current strategies include:

1. Authorized Insecticide Application:

The application of authorized and registered insecticides is done directly through the manual fumigation of the hedges using a water tank and the pulverization of the ficus hedges and trees.

Generally, after each hedge or tree trimming, they are treated. This practice allows the insecticides to penetrate deep into the core of the hedges, targeting areas where *Macrophotoma gladiata* tends to hide and seek shelter.

2. Control and Elimination of Hot Spots:

Currently when we are notified by an owner or administrator, we fumigate the hedge(s) in question, however, the largest problem we currently face in controlling the mealy bug pest problem is locked rear gardens. With locked gardens where we are unable to trim hedges and afterwards spray them, this uncontrolled focal point allows for the pest to go unchecked and as such it easily spreads back to those hedges that have been trimmed and fumigated.

TOTAL NUMBER OF CLOSED BACK GARDENS: 48

3. How Owners can Help:

Owners can help control the pest of the mealy bug in the following ways:

1. Leave gate to rear garden unlocked when the trimming and spraying of hedges has been scheduled.
2. If you have a **large infestation** in your hedge, please **report** this to the **administrator** so that the focal point can be treated as soon as possible.
3. If you have a **small infestation**, any focal points can be manually **trimmed off** and placed in a plastic bag and tied off and **thrown away** in the rubbish bin.
4. The mealy bug is protected by a white waxy layer; this layer can be broken by placing dishwashing soap in a **spray bottle** and directly focusing the spray at the white layer and spraying it directly several times.