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Invasive Species Alert: Jumping Worms

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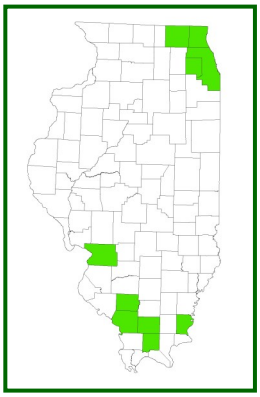

Counties with documented populations (as of January 2017)

Jumping worms, (Amynthas spp.) have recently been discovered in Illinois. This new invasive species was first identified in Illinois in 2015 in northern Illinois and in 2016 in southern Illinois. Jumping worms are earthworms native to East Asia. They also have been called crazy worms, Alabama jumpers, and snake worms.

Jumping worms are voracious consumers of organic material, which can affect soil quality. They breed quickly and eggs survive Illinois winters. Adults reach maturity in approximately 60 days, allowing populations to grow exponentially during the growing season. These worms are also capable of reproducing without mating.

There are concerns about the effects these worms will have on forests and other natural areas as well as agricultural and landscaped areas. Populations of jumping worms have the potential to change the soil structure, deplete available nutrients, damage plant roots, and alter water holding capacity of the soil.

Report suspect populations of Jumping Worms in Illinois!

Populations of jumping worms are known from other states, where they are considered to be highly invasive and detrimental. Investigations are still ongoing in Illinois and a project is underway to locate new populations of this species in Illinois. If anyone suspects they have a population of jumping worms, please contact Extension Forester Chris Evans (cwevans@illinois.edu or 618-695-3383) or the Plant Clinic (plantclinic@illinois.edu or 217-333-0519).

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Key Identification Characteristics

- Large worm (4-8 inches)
- Generally darker on top than the bottom
- Smooth, milky white clitellum (colored band) that completely circles the body and is not raised
- Skin glossy or iridescent
- Thrashes wildly when handled or disturbed
- Can shed tail in defense
- Found in leaf litter and top 3-4 inches of soil
- Adults usually seen from mid-summer through first hard freeze
- Established populations can produce a unique soil signature that resembles coffee grounds

Prevent the spread of jumping worms and their eggs by cleaning equipment before moving to another site, reducing the transportation of mulch and soil, and carefully inspecting nursery plants before installing them in a new landscape.

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Scott Schirmer, Nursery and Northern Field Office Section Manager, Illinois Department of Agriculture

Websites related to current topic:

Illinois Plant Clinic

- http://web.extension.illinois.edu/plantclinic/

Wisconsin DNR Jumping Worm page

- http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/invasives/fact/jumpingWorm/index.html

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