

Jumping Worms

Introduction

- Earthworms are not native to Wisconsin and in large numbers can harm beneficial soil life and plant growth.
- Jumping worms are a type of earthworm originally from Asia that are very invasive and more destructive than other earthworms. They are also called Asian worms or crazy worms. They get their name because they thrash wildly and often jump around.

Why are jumping worms a problem?

- Jumping worms mature twice and reproduce more quickly compared to other worms. They feed on organic matter in soil, leaf litter and mulch and excrete grainy looking hard little pellets, called castings, that alter the texture and composition of soil. The resulting soil, which resembles large coffee grounds, provides poor structure and support for many plants.

Jumping worm identification

- Mustard test: 1/3-1/2 cup ground yellow mustard in 1 gal water
- Jumping worms do not burrow far into the soil unlike other earth worms. They live on the soil surface or the top 1-2 in and thrive in leaf and wood mulch and debris. They tend to occur in large numbers; where there's one, there are always more. If you use cardboard in your garden, check underneath.
- What do they look like?
 - Smooth, glossy dark gray/brown color, up to 8-10 inches in length
 - Clitellum (collar) is cloudy-white to gray; close to the head; completely encircles the body and is flush with the rest of the body.
 - Snake-like movement

Life cycle

- April-May: Tiny worms hatch from cocoon-encased eggs.
- May-June: juvenile worms; more difficult to identify.
- July: Adults begin to appear.
- August-September: Mature worms reproduce. Jumping worms are parthenogenic meaning they can reproduce without a mate.
- First freeze: Adults die.
- Winter months: Cocoons with eggs overwinter in soil.

Prevention

- Use mulch, compost and soil that is free of jumping worms.
- Be careful where you get plants. Rinse roots before planting if possible.
- Arrive clean, leave clean.

Management

- No approved, effective control methods
- Remove and destroy jumping worms when you see them. Hand pick and seal in Ziploc bags.
- Solarize: Heat treatment to 104 degrees for 3 days using sheets of clear plastic kills adults and cocoons.
- Chemical treatment: BotaniGard, tea seed meal kills adults (active ingredient: saponin)

If you see jumping worms or would like help identifying, contact Jean at oldsaukgardens@gmail.com.