

# Quick Facts About Jumping Worms

## Origin

All earthworms in Wisconsin are non-native and arrived after the last glaciers retreated.

European earthworms have spread throughout the state since colonists arrived in the 1800s.

Jumping worms (*Amyntas* species) are native to East Central Asia. They were first confirmed in Wisconsin in 2013, though they have likely been here longer.



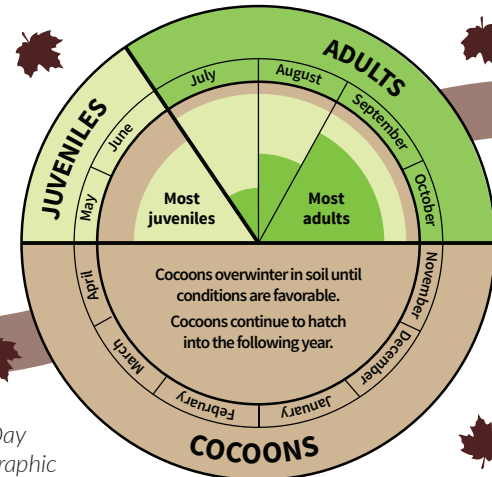
## Habitat

The jumping worm species found in Wisconsin live in the leaf litter and top soil layer.

They are voracious eaters and consume a lot of organic matter, especially the leaves that fall on the ground. This layer of decomposing material, called the duff layer, is important for healthy soil and plant nutrition. When jumping worms consume this layer, it changes the soil and nutrients and makes it harder for plants to grow well.

## Life cycle

Jumping worms have an annual life cycle. They can reproduce asexually, shedding cocoons (eggs) into the soil. The worms start to mature by July, with the largest mature populations in early fall. Adults die and only the cocoons overwinter, hatching in the spring to start the cycle again.



Left: Photo by Susan Day  
Right: Redrawn from graphic  
by Marie Johnston

## Identification

Mature jumping worms are easily identified by the milky white band near their head. This band is called the **clitellum**.

Nightcrawlers and red worms\* also have a clitellum, but it's raised and the color is similar to the body color.

If your **soil** looks like coarse coffee grounds or taco meat, it's a likely sign that you have jumping worms. This "soil signature" consists of worm castings – better known as poop.



Jumping worms will thrash and move like snakes when disturbed! They can also drop their tails.

Jumping worm **cocoons** are small and may look like dirt or castings. They are often hard to find.



Young jumping worms look a lot like mature jumping worms except their clitellum has not fully formed. But they can be hard to tell apart from other earthworms.

\**Lumbricus terrestris* and *L. rubellus*



Left: Photo by Susan Day  
Center: Photo by Marie Johnston



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## What can I do?

Jumping worm cocoons are small and immature worms are hard to identify – so people don't always know they have them if the population is small.

Worms can be unknowingly spread in mulch, compost, and other landscape material, or in soil. It is best not to share plants unless they are bare-rooted or you are sure your soil is free of jumping worms.

Clean your shoes/boots if you've been in an area that might have jumping worms. Don't use jumping worms as fishing bait! And don't discard worms in natural areas, especially forests.

Learn how to stop the spread and protect Wisconsin forests:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Invasives/fact/jumpingWorm.html>



Questions? Email  
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