

JUMPING WORMS, *Amyntas Spp.*, also known as Asian jumping worms, crazy worms, Alabama jumpers and snake worms, are invasive earthworms first found in Wisconsin in 2013. Native to eastern Asia, they present challenges to homeowners, gardeners and forest managers. Jumping worms get their name from their behavior. When handled, they violently thrash, spring into the air and can even shed their tails to escape.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR JUMPING WORMS

- Jumping worms do not burrow far into soil – they live on the soil surface in debris and leaf litter.
- Look for them in your yard, garden, forest, in mulch, compost, potted plants and other suitable places.

WHAT JUMPING WORMS LOOK LIKE

- Smooth, glossy dark gray/brown color
- Clitellum*, the lighter colored band, is cloudy-white to gray; completely encircles the body. Its surface is flush with rest of body
- Bodies are firm and not coated in “slime”
- Snake-like movement
- They tend to occur in large numbers; Where there’s one, there are always more

**The clitellum is a band of glandular tissue composed that partially or fully encircles the worm’s body.*

WHEN TO LOOK FOR JUMPING WORMS

Jumping worms are most noticeable in late summer/early autumn when most of them are fully mature.

Time of year	Activity
April -May	Tiny jumping worms hatch from cocoon-encased eggs.
Summer months	Worms feed and grow.
August – September	Mature worms reproduce, depositing egg-filled cocoons into surroundings. Jumping worms are parthenogenic; each worm can reproduce on its own without a mate.
First freeze	Adult worms die.
Winter months	Eggs spend cold months protected in cocoons (about the size of mustard seeds!)

COMPARISON: JUMPING WORM VS. EUROPEAN NIGHTCRAWLER

Jumping worm	European nightcrawler
	
Brown/gray	Pink/reddish
Bodies are sleek, dry, smooth and firm	Bodies are thick, slimy, floppy
Thrash violently when disturbed; snake-like movement	Wiggle and stretch when disturbed.
Mature worm 4-5 inches long	Mature worm 6-8 inches long
Light colored, smooth clitellum* that is flush with body, relatively close to head. Completely encircles body.	Reddish or pink clitellum* slightly raised from rest of body. Partially encircles body (like a saddle).



Tiny cocoons are difficult to see.

Photo by UW Arboretum

THE REAL PROBLEM: COCOONS

Unlike most other kinds of earthworms, jumping worms are parthenogenic - they self-fertilize and do not need mates to reproduce. Each new generation begins with the production of hardened egg capsules, known as cocoons, that overwinter in the soil to hatch the following spring. Jumping worm cocoons are resistant to cold and drought and are as tiny as mustard seeds. Since they greatly resemble small bits of dirt, they are hard to see and so are often unknowingly moved in soil, mulch, potted plants, etc.



Newly hatched jumping worm.
Photo by UW Arboretum.

How To Locate Jumping Worms If You Are Suspicious of Their Presence on Your Property

EARTHWORM SAMPLING

- Mix 1/3 cup dry mustard powder with 1 gallon of water.
- Remove leaves and other litter from soil surface.
- Pour half of the solution over 1 square foot of soil
- Wait for a few minutes, then pour the other half.
- Collect worms as they come to the surface.

Both earthworms and jumping worms will come to the surface, however the jumping worms will thrash about. This does not kill the worms, it only aids in identifying where there is a problem.

This video demonstrates the movement of Jumping Worms

<https://youtu.be/jrGnUFDXuyQ>

Resources:

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources www.dnr.wisconsin.gov