

Contain Those Crawlers!

Protecting Minnesota from Invasive Earthworms

Why are earthworms a problem?

- No earthworms are native to Minnesota. Minnesota's forests developed in the absence of earthworms.
- Without worms, fallen leaves decompose slowly, creating a spongy layer of organic "duff". This duff layer is the natural growing environment for native woodland wildflowers.
- Invading earthworms eat the leaves that create the duff layer. Big trees survive, but many young tree seedlings, ferns and wildflowers die. Without the duff layer, habitat is lost for ground-dwelling animals and soil erosion can increase.

What worms are in Minnesota?

- The first earthworms probably arrived with soils and plants brought from Europe. More recently, the widespread use of earthworms as fishing bait has spread them to more remote areas of the state. All common bait worms are non-native species, including those sold as "night crawlers," "Canadian crawlers," "leaf worms," or "angle worms."
- **Jumping worms** (*Amyntas agrestis* and related species) are a new type of invasive earthworm that are starting to be reported in Minnesota. We have a chance to prevent their spread in Minnesota. They are called "jumping worms" because of their unusual behavior when disturbed – they are very active when disturbed, move like a snake and sometimes appear to be jumping.

What can I do to prevent the spread of earthworms?

- Dispose of unwanted bait worms in the trash.
- Don't buy worms advertised as jumping worms, "snake worms," "Alabama jumpers" or "crazy worms" for any purpose.
- Never release any worm into the environment – all earthworms are non-native to Minnesota.
- Clean mud from your boots, ATV and other gear before entering and leaving recreation sites. Earthworms and their cocoons can be spread in mud.

What should I do if I think I've seen a jumping worm?

- Take photos of the live worm including close ups of the ring (clitellum) around their body.
- Take a short video of the movement of the worm when touched.
- If possible, keep the specimen, in case an expert needs to see the sample. Add alcohol to a small bottle, jar, re-sealable plastic bag, or plastic storage container. Place the worm inside and store in the refrigerator.
- Send photos to Laura.Vanriper@state.mn.us for help with identification.

For more information visit:

- The DNR earthworm webpage: www.mndnr.gov/invasives/terrestrialanimals/earthworms
- The DNR jumping worm webpage: www.mndnr.gov/invasives/terrestrialanimals/jumping-worm