

# Vermont Forest Health

## Jumping Worms: Fact Sheet



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 AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOODS & MARKETS  
 VERMONT  
 FOREST HEALTH AND WILDLIFE

### What are jumping worms?

- Asian earthworms (genus: *Amyntas*), also known as Jumping Worms (JW's), are an invasive species that alter soil qualities
- JW's get their name from their active and hyper behavior – thrashing wildly when agitated
- With an extraordinarily high metabolism, JW's can live in very high densities which can have catastrophic effects on native ecosystems
- For more information about JW's in VT scan QR Code below



PC Brian Day/JW - Agbotarium

### What's the damage?

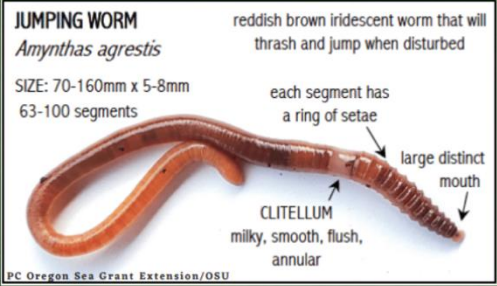
- Jumping Worms pose a threat to:
  - forest health by altering soil structure and density
  - biodiversity in affected areas
- JW's change soil structure by consuming the upper organic layer of soil, which leaches nutrients and erodes the ground making the soil inhospitable for some plants and animals
- The crumbly soil created by jumping worms makes it hard for many plants (including garden plants) to grow and threatens even the most well-tended lawns



PC Wisconsin DNR  
**European nightcrawler**  
 Raised clitellum, further from head  
**Jumping worm**  
 Smooth clitellum, closer to head

### Jumping Worm Description

- **Life Cycle:**
  - Most have an annual life cycle – hatching in the spring from poppy-seed-sized cocoons and maturing after 70-90 days later
  - Once mature, the worms can produce new cocoons without a mate in the late fall after which the adults die, but the cocoons over-winter to start the next generation
- **Behavior:** The worms thrash wildly when agitated and often jump or flip over. Sometimes they cast off the end of their tail
- **Castings:** Their castings (feces) appear like coarse coffee grounds that create a loose layer between leaf litter and mineral soil beneath
- **Look-alikes:** Unlike nightcrawlers, which have a raised pin-red collar (clitellum) more central along the body, Jumping worm adults have a smooth milky-white collar close to the head end



**JUMPING WORM**  
*Amyntas agrestis*  
 reddish brown iridescent worm that will thrash and jump when disturbed  
 SIZE: 70-160mm x 5-8mm  
 63-100 segments  
 each segment has a ring of setae  
 large distinct mouth  
**CLITELLUM**  
 milky, smooth, flush, annular  
 PC Oregon Sea Grant Extension/OSU

## Do's

## Take Initiative

## Don'ts

- Learn to identify JW's by their appearance and behavior as the worms may be mislabeled
- Check new mulch, compost, and soil for JW's
- When using earthworms for vermicomposting, freeze it solid for at least 1 week (a month is better) before using
- Check the soil and roots of potted plants and trees for JW's or castings before planting
- Choose bare-root plants over potted plants to minimize risk
- Check your property periodically for JW's by raking leaf layer and checking underneath
- Dispose of all contaminated soil and castings in the trash and kill the worms by (1) placing them in a bag to be either left out in the sun or freezing temperatures or (2) drowning in vinegar or rubbing alcohol
- Do not dispose of JW's or unused fishing bait in woods or water
- Do not transport leaves, mulch, compost or soil from one place to another unless you are confident that there are no earthworms or their cocoons present
- Do not buy or use JW's for vermicomposting
- Do not buy or use JW's for fishing bait



**REPORT IT!**  
[vtinvasives.org](http://vtinvasives.org)

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