



## Jumping Worm (*Amyntas spp.*)

The "Jumping Worm", (*Amyntas spp.*), is an invasive earthworm native to East Asia. It may also be known as crazy worm, Alabama jumper and snake worm. Currently the extent of the Jumping Worm's presence in New York State is unknown. However, because the worms reproduce and spread rapidly and have the potential to cause significant environmental damage, it is critical to identify areas of infestation and adopt practices to reduce their spread.



Crazy worms have been found from Vermont to South Carolina.

### Worm Basics

The name speaks for itself! They act crazy, jump and thrash when handled, and behave more like a threatened snake than a worm. They also may shed their tails when handled. Jumping Worms can be 1.5 to 8 inches long. The narrow band around their body (clitellum) is milky white and smooth, unlike other species which have a raised clitellum. Jumping worms reproduce asexually (parthenogenetic) and mature in just 60 days, so each year they can produce two hatches. The best time to see them is late June and early July. From September until the first hard frost their population will double and may reach damaging levels.

### What is their impact?

Jumping Worms change the soil structure by disrupting the natural decomposition of leaf litter on the forest floor. They turn good soil into grainy, dry worm castings (excrement) that cannot support the understory plants of our forests. Other plants, animals and fungi disappear because the understory community can no longer support them. Jumping Worms in residential and urban areas can also cause harm to ornamental plantings and turf.

Jumping Worms have a voracious appetite, speedy life cycle and a competitive edge. In fact, in areas with Jumping Worms there are no other species of earthworm. They can cause long term damage to the forests of New York which are already under pressure from other invasive insects, plants, pathogens and diseases.

### How to Identify Crazy Worms

Jumping Worm's can be easily identified by their appearance, behavior and the soil "signature" that they leave. Identifying characteristics include the following:

- Unusually large presence of earthworms near the soil surface
- Soil may look like hard, grainy pellets resembling coffee grounds or Grape Nuts (see photo below)
- Worms are brown to grayish black;
- Clitellum (lighter colored band) is smooth, cloudy white to gray and completely encircles the body near the head;
- Body is rigid and does not produce slime like many other earthworms;
- Behavior includes quick movement, wild thrashing and sometimes shedding of the tail when handled (see video at <https://youtu.be/jrGnUFDXuyQ>).
- They live on the soil surface and in the leaf litter.

## Jumping Worms in New York

Jumping worms have been widely reported in New York, New England and the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern States. While Jumping Worms may not yet have infested large areas of New York State, they spread very quickly and have the potential to cause significant environmental damage. Therefore, reporting infestations and adopting practices to reduce their spread is critical. Currently all species of Jumping Worms (*Amyntas* spp.) are listed as a prohibited invasive animals under New York's 6 NYCRR Part 575 - *Prohibited and Regulated Invasive Species* (September 10, 2014) and cannot be sold, transported, or purchased in the State of New York.



## What You Can Do

We need your help: If you have seen Jumping Worms in your yard or garden, in your compost, at a boat landing, or in a forest near you please call the Hudson office at (518) 828-3346 x105 or the Acra office at (518) 622-9820 x42. You can also email us at [colgreng@cornell.edu](mailto:colgreng@cornell.edu).

The Master Gardener Volunteers of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties are available to provide research-based gardening information and services to county residents such as soil testing, identification of pests and diseases, and answering gardener's horticultural questions.

Follow these simple steps to reduce the spread of Jumping Worms:

1. Do not buy Jumping Worms for composting, vermicomposting, gardening or bait.
2. Monitor your garden for Jumping Worms and their unique soil signature.
3. Avoid introducing organic mulch or soil from outside sources.
4. Plant bare root stock or seeds when possible.
5. If you have Jumping Worms remove and dispose of them and monitor your plants for drought and root loss.  
Proper disposal methods include solarizing them or soaking them in alcohol.

For additional information, please visit <http://ccecolumbiagreene.org/natural-resources/invasive-nuisance-species/invasive-pests/jumping-worm-amynthas-spp-1>.

---

*Last updated December 14, 2017*

*Information provided has been adapted from:*

Crazy Worm (*Amyntas Agrestis*) Factsheet, Wisconsin DNR (<https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/leaf/Documents/Crazy%20worms%20fact%20sheet.pdf>)  
Jumping Worm Field Guide, Wisconsin DNR PUB FR-550a 2015 (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/forestmanagement/documents/pub/FR-550a.pdf>).  
6 NYCRR Part 575 – "*Prohibited and Regulated Invasive Species*" found at [http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands\\_forests\\_pdf/islist.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/islist.pdf)

***Cornell Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity, affirmative action educator and employer.***