

New Regulations Regarding Jumping Worms: Summary for Homeowners

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New regulation

On February 20, 2024 the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources announced that it had classified 13 high-risk invasive aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates as prohibited invasive species. Jumping worms (*Amyntas* and *Metaphire* species) become prohibited invasive species on Jul 1, 2024. The DNR classifies invasive species as prohibited to prevent their introduction and spread in Minnesota and to protect the state's environment, economy, natural resources and outdoor recreation. It is unlawful to possess, import, purchase, transport or introduce prohibited invasive species, except under a DNR-issued permit for disposal, decontamination, control, research or education. Previously, jumping worms could be sold for purposes such as bait or vermicomposting, but this is now illegal.

Why are jumping worms a problem?

No earthworms are native to Minnesota. Minnesota's forests developed without 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. Invasive 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. Jumping worms are relatively new to Minnesota. They were regulated due to their negative impacts which include:

- Jumping worms can dramatically change soils, giving it a unique texture similar to coffee grounds which can increase erosion.
- Jumping worms eat mulch and leaf litter and strip vital nutrients from topsoil.
- Homeowners may see garden plants killed and may have difficulty growing plants.
- Jumping worms can cause environmental harm in forests. When the soil changes, the forest can't support the same plant and animal species it did before earthworms.

Jumping worms and their small (0.1 inch) egg cases (called cocoons) can be spread through unfinished compost, soil, sod, and wood chips.



Jumping worm photo by Tyler Baumann, University of Minnesota

What does this mean for homeowners?

Homeowners are encouraged to learn about jumping worms and look to see if they are present on your property. If you think you may have jumping worms on your site, you can send in a report to the DNR to help you with identification. Visit the DNR jumping worm webpage for information on reporting:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialanimals/jumping-worm/index.html>.

I have jumping worms in my yard and/or garden. What should I do?

- *Keep calm.* We are learning about the impacts of jumping worms in Minnesota. It is not clear what impacts they will have at which places and for how long. Your report will help scientists better understand jumping worms in Minnesota.
- *Prevent their spread off your site.* Jumping worms and their cocoons (egg cases) can be moved when soil, leaves, mulch, and/or other organic material are moved from place to place. By keeping that material on site, if possible, you reduce the chance of spreading worms to new places.
- *Dispose of jumping worms in the trash.* Jumping worms live near the top of the soil surface and in the leaf and mulch layer on top of the surface. If you choose, you can hand collect worms, seal them in a bag, and dispose of them in the trash. It is not clear if hand collection can cause a noticeable decrease jumping worm populations over time, but if you do want to dispose of a jumping worm, you may dispose of them in the trash.
- *Get involved.* Research is moving forward on understanding jumping worms and developing ways to manage them in a yard and garden setting. Share information on jumping worms with your friends and neighbors and get involved with local gardening groups.

How can businesses reduce my risk?

Prior to the rule change, businesses could legally sell jumping worms. Businesses that provide services to your home or property that involve digging into soil, or that sell/transport/install plants or mulch may unknowingly transport soil that contains worm eggs or small live worms. Many businesses are actively working to prevent the spread of jumping worms, but others may not be aware of jumping worms. Proactive actions businesses may take include:

- Training staff about jumping worms and invasive species prevention.
- Inspecting new materials for jumping worms before distributing them at a site.
- If bringing in compost, inspecting the compost for adult jumping worms and making sure the supplier has followed the process for further reducing pathogens.
- Have staff and equipment “arrive clean, leave clean” when working at multiple sites to reduce the chances of spreading jumping worms through soil on boots and equipment.
- Bait and vermicomposting businesses may not sell jumping worms.

Resources

- Minnesota DNR jumping worm webpage:
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialanimals/jumping-worm/index.html>.
- A webpage of frequently asked questions about jumping worms and rulemaking:
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/jumping-worms-frequently-asked-questions-about-proposed-rule-change.html>
- DNR Information Center: 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367