Earthworms might be a friendly sight in gardens or your favorite tool for catching fish, but most earthworms in the northeast U.S. are non-native. Jumping worms, a group of species originally from Asia, are invasive species that alter soil qualities and make it inhospitable for some plants and animals. They do this by consuming the upper organic layer of soil, which leaches nutrients and erodes the ground. This makes it hard for many plants (including garden plants) to grow and threatens even the most well-tended lawns. What’s worse—humans spread worms without realizing it, carrying jumping worm egg cases (cocoons) in soil, mulch, potted plants, landscaping equipment, and even the treads of shoes and tires.

**KNOW THE WORM**

**Life Cycle:** Most jumping worms have an annual life cycle. In the spring they hatch from poppy-seed-sized cocoons and after 70-90 days become mature and can produce new cocoons. In the late fall, adults die but the cocoons over-winter to start the next generation.

**Behavior:** These worms thrash wildly 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:** Jumping worms might be confused with another invasive worm, the nightcrawler (*Lumbricus* spp.); both can be large with dark coloring. Jumping worm adults have a smooth milky-white collar (clitellum) close to the head end (14-16 segments away), whereas nightcrawlers have a raised pink-red collar more central along the worm’s body.

**IN A NUTSHELL**

When jumping worms invade, they consume and degrade soil which threatens the future of gardens, forests, and lawns.

Jumping worms are often spread by people through mulch, compost, gardening tools, and treads.

Stop the spread! Use our checklist (pg. 2) to be worm-smart.
Do not buy or use jumping worms for bait, vermi-composting, or gardening. Purchased earthworms may also be mislabeled, so learn to identify jumping worms by their look and behavior.

Scout the Soil: Check new mulch, compost, and soil for jumping worms and inquire with providers if measures have been taken to reduce the spread of jumping worms.

Use mulch, compost and soil that are free of jumping worms and cocoons.

If you can’t confirm the source is jumping worm-free, only purchase or trade mulch, compost, and soil that has been heated to appropriate temperatures and duration following protocols for reducing pathogens (104 - 130°F for three days is sufficient).

Scan the Plants: Check the soil and roots of potted plants and trees for jumping worms or castings before planting them in your yard.

When the option exists, choose bare-root plants over potted plants, ensuring no soil remains affixed.

If you find jumping worms in materials you bring in, dispose of all contaminated soil and castings in the trash and kill worms by freezing or leaving in a bag out in the sun, then discard. Alternatively, worms may be killed using vinegar or rubbing alcohol.