

Natural Resources Stewardship Committee (NRSC) News

Protecting Forests from Worms, Good, Bad and Ugly

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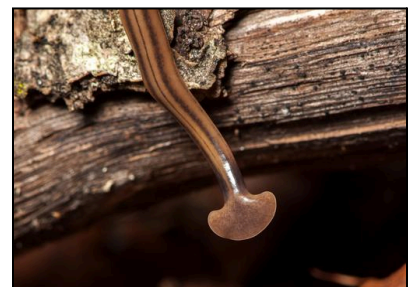
In general, earthworms are considered harmless, beneficial residents of the soil. They break down dead and decaying organic matter into rich humus soil, thereby supporting plant growth. and dig tiny channels that aerate soil and improve drainage.

However, here in WNC and in most other parts of the US, there are several species of invasive worms that are of major concern. They include the Asian jumping worm, the hammer head, and the terrestrial flatworm, which began arriving in the early 1900s, tucked away in the soil of potted plants. The problem is that in recent decades these species (as well as common earthworms) are now being found in natural forested ecosystems, which devastates the forest floor.

[Asian jumping worms](#) are also known as crazy snake worms, Alabama jumpers, and Jersey wigglers because they move more like a snake and can flip a foot off the ground. These worms are easy to find because they live in the top 6 inches of soil, which will look more like coffee grounds than soil. They destroy the good earthworms by wrapping themselves around them and digesting it from the outside in.



[Hammerhead flatworms](#) are about 1/8" wide and about 1' long, with a rounded hammer shaped head. If picked up, the worm will break into pieces and regenerate.



[Terrestrial flatworms](#) resemble a slug but are dark brown, blue gray, or black. They wrap around their prey and digest it on the underside of their body where their mouth is located.



It is in the best interest of our forest as well as our gardens to eliminate them as soon as they are discovered. To help [identify good from bad worms](#), remember that the European (good) worm moves slowly with its head stretched in the direction it is going and then it pulls the rest of its body forward. Also, the European worm has a saddle shaped ring that swells up and does not wrap around the entire body where the Asian jumping worm has an annular ring that is less swollen that wraps around the entire body.

To destroy the invaders, pick them up with a gloved hand (some species are toxic to the skin), place into a bag, add salt and throw it in the garbage. They are also very sensitive to vinegar and carrying a spray bottle while gardening is a viable option to kill them. To prevent further invasions be sure to check the dirt in the pot of plants that you purchase at a store/nursery or receive from friends. If you find worms or small yellow eggs, you should place them in a plastic bag with salt and dispose of them.

BEARS IN NOVEMBER from the NRSC and BearWise

Bears Still Eating More, Sleeping Less

Hyperphagia is in full-swing as bears may be awake and searching for food up to 20 hours a day. Many bears also look for den sites. Even bears that won't hibernate until December still industriously look for food practically around the clock and eat as much as they can find. For a bear, there's no such thing as "too fat." All those pounds of fat reserves will keep bears healthy all winter long. Food and food odors attract bears, so don't reward them with easily available food, liquids or garbage. If you don't take that bird feeder down, they will.



Den-Up Isn't Predictable

The bear calendar is driven less by dates and more by available food, weather and the general health and condition of the bear. In poor food years female bears may den-up by late October or early November; big males may stay out of their dens and search for food until late December or early January. If you don't take that bird feeder down, they will.



Climate Matters

Bears in northern climates generally enter their dens earlier than bears in the more temperate South or the warmer regions of the Southwest. In areas and at elevations where winter is knocking on the door, bears are seriously looking for winter quarters, and may enter their dens by the end of October.

You can help to prevent problems for the hard-working bears in your area.

- Review the [BearWise Basics for Home](#) and [Outdoors](#).
- Make sure anything that might attract a bear is safely out of sight, smell and reach.
- Be extra alert when driving or walking at night.
- Check the yard before letting out your pets.
- Know what to do if you encounter a bear.
- Share what you know with neighbors and others in your community.

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