



ECOLOGY NEWS

ACTION CENTER

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Fix a Leak Week

Looking for a way to save money and water? The EPA's annual Fix a Leak Week was March 18 through 24, 2024 but leaks can be fixed all year round! Household related leaks waste almost 1 trillion gallons of water nationwide every year.

Many household leaks are quick and easy to find if you know where to look. Start by inspecting your water bill for any suspicious spikes in usage. If water usage unexpectedly increases, you may have a leak on your hands. Reading your water meter is also a great way to start looking for leaks. First, locate your water meter, likely in the basement where the water line enters. Identify a two-hour window where you can avoid any water usage and take a reading. Then after two hours check the meter again. If the number is not the same, you likely have a leak.

The 'toilet test' can also help you detect leaks. Put a few drops of food coloring into the toilet tank and let it sit. If color appears in the bowl after 10 minutes, there is a leak in the toilet. Replacing the valve seal can help to solve this problem.

The most common places where leaks occur:

- Toilets, showerheads, and bathtubs
- Faucets, sprayers, and beneath the sink
- Dishwashers, refrigerators with ice makers, water heaters, & clothes washers
- Outdoors – spigots, sprinklers, fountains, and irrigation systems

Checking these spots in your home regularly will help you stay on top of possible repairs and avoid leaks throughout the year. Staying vigilant can save homeowners 10% on their water bill! To learn more about how to be water conscious all year long, visit ecologyactioncenter.org/clean-water/water-conservation/

The information in this article is from the US Environmental Protection Agency: epa.gov/watersense/fix-leak-week.



The EPA's water-efficiency hero, Flo!

Small Battery Recycling

Batteries play a crucial role in powering our daily lives and can be found in an array of household items. From power tools to remote controls, batteries come in many shapes and sizes. While it may be easy to remember to recycle our regular household batteries, sometimes we forget about small battery recycling. Small batteries pose just as much of a risk (or more!) as any other battery, and steps should be taken to ensure their safe disposal.

Button-cell or coin batteries are small, round batteries that are commonly used in products such as watches, hearing aids, key fobs, calculators, medical devices, and even some unexpected items like singing greeting cards. Historically, these batteries have been made with various heavy metals as their main component but today they are typically made of lithium metal which can pose a serious fire risk if not disposed of properly.

These batteries, along with lithium-ion batteries which are commonly found in rechargeable devices like cellphones and laptops, should **NEVER** go in household garbage or recycling carts. They can cause fires during transport to landfills or recycling facilities and during the sorting process at recycling facilities. Fires occur when batteries become damaged, come into contact with one another or with other metals, or they can self-ignite as they release the energy they contain.

Recycling fires are increasingly common in the United States and continue to rise. The challenge is not just with the growing number of products containing these batteries but with the increased difficulty of filtering out these tiny combustibles as they go through the sorting process.

To prevent fires, the Environmental Protection Agency recommends taping the battery terminals or connections with non-conductive tape. Electrical tape is preferred, but any adhesive tape that is not made out of metallic material will work. You can also individually bag the batteries to keep them from coming into contact with one another.

To identify this type of battery, look for the chasing arrow symbol with the words "Li-ion" below it. Often, the battery or device may list its chemistry on the battery's case, instruction manual, or product markings. It's important to note that the chasing arrow symbol (the common recycling symbol) does NOT mean that these batteries can be put in the household recycling bin.

In fact, you should NEVER put batteries of any kind in your recycling bin. They can only be recycled through specialty recyclers or collection events. All types of batteries can be recycled locally at Batteries Plus Bulbs in Normal or Interstate Batteries in Bloomington (a small fee may apply) or at a Household Hazardous Waste Collection event or facility.

Great POWER
means
Recycling Responsibly

Batteries Are Everywhere
#KnowBeforeYouThrow
<https://illinoispsc.org/batteries/>

The Oscar for the Best Horror Goes to... Jumping Worms

A worm that can change soil structure by consuming organic material sounds like the plot to a terrible horror movie, but this isn't fiction. Jumping worms, colloquially known as crazy worms, Alabama jumpers, or snake worms, are an invasive worm species from East Asia who made their first appearance in Northern Illinois in 2015. These worms reproduce quickly without mating, through a process of self-fertilization. Jumping worm eggs withstand the frigid Illinois winter and reach maturity in about 60 days. This means jumping worm populations can double in a single growing season.

These worms wreak havoc on our Illinois landscape by consuming top layers of organic material, quickly converting the soil to grainy castings that look like dry coffee grounds. They are found in the top 3 inches of soil, or in leaf litter. They deplete the soil of available nutrients, which damages plant roots, reduces habitats for soil macroinvertebrates, and can alter the water retention capacity of the soil and the soil structure¹. These worms can be identified by their thrashing motion when handled or disturbed. They are very large worms (4-8 inches) and are generally darker on top than bottom with glossy and iridescent skin. The most notable difference between jumping worms and the common earth worm is the smooth, milky white clitellum (colored band) that completely wraps around their body¹.

It is thought that these worms originally came to the United States to be sold for vermiculture or to be used as fishing bait. Now they have been found in a total of 46 counties in Illinois including McLean County. To check if you have jumping worms in your yard follow these steps:

1. Mix 1 gallon of water with 1/3 cup of ground yellow mustard seed.
2. Clear a bare batch of soil and pour the solution slowly over the soil.
3. The solution will irritate the worms and drive them to the surface.

Safely destroy worms by placing them in a plastic bag in the sun for 10 minutes².

If you confirm that you have jumping worms, work to maintain organic matter by fertilizing and mulching. If you are planning on moving plants in your yard, remove the soil and wash plant roots before transplanting to avoid spreading the eggs². Additionally, if you backyard compost make sure to keep your compost at 104 degrees Fahrenheit or higher to kill off any eggs.

It is important to minimize the spread of this invasive species. When visiting natural areas or gardens, make sure you arrive clean and leave clean. Clean off equipment and shoes from site to site. Do not share plants or garden tools. Decrease the likelihood of bringing in jumping worms by opting for heat treated commercial compost and mulch and by inspecting new nursery plants carefully before planting³.



Source: Illinois Plant Clinic
Jumping worms have a smooth, dark body and a light-colored band that is not raised unlike other worms.



Source: Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org
Earthworms are a red-brown with a raised clitellum.

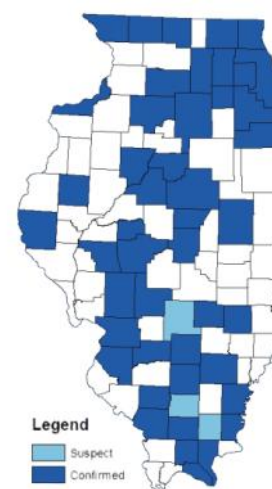


Fig. 4. Jumping worm distribution in Illinois counties as of August 2022.
Map: Chris Evans, University of Illinois Extension.

¹https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/invasive_species_alert_jumping_worms.pdf

²https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/jumping_worms_factsheet_09202021.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3ZnArP87yceu8-qGT0vMytSnPLfwbfIZyeycQtektuCd6BdwHc6-ln7pg

³https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/jumping_worms_factsheet_10182022.pdf



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