

Just the Facts...

Periodical Cicada Emergence in 2004



Image from North Carolina State University

Adult Periodical Cicada

Question. What is a periodical cicada? (Pronounced si-KAY-da)

Answer. Cicadas are flying insects, closely related to aphids. Adult cicadas are approximately 1.5 inches in length with prominent wide-set eyes, short antennae, and two pairs of clear wings that fold over their backs when they are resting.

Adult periodical cicadas emerge every 13 or 17 years. The adults have black bodies, red eyes, and clear wings with yellowish orange wing veins. Most adult periodical cicadas will emerge in May and June or after the soil temperature reaches 64-65°F. The cicadas that will emerge in 2004 in the eastern US are 17-year periodical cicadas from Brood X (10).

Question. How many periodical cicadas will be flying around during the summer months of 2004?

Answer. Populations of periodical cicadas from Brood X could be as dense as 1.5 million cicadas per acre in the eastern United States.

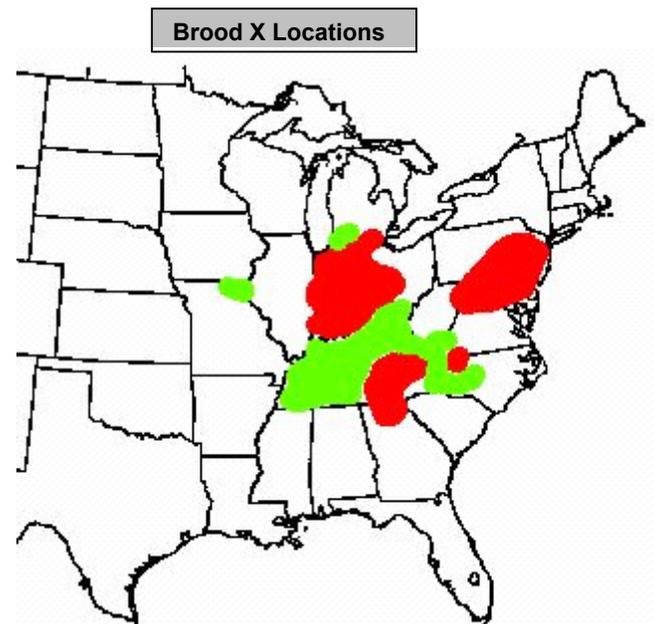


Image from the University of Michigan

Red = Well-established brood records
Green = Less-established brood records

Question. What is a cicada "brood"?

Answer. A cicada "brood" is a reference to a geographic localized population of cicadas that will simultaneously emerge as adults in a given year. Brood X is a specific group of 17-year periodical cicadas and it is the largest brood in the United States.

Question. Do cicadas represent a health hazard?

Answer. No, cicadas are harmless. They do not bite, sting, or transmit diseases.

Question. Do cicadas cause any type of damage?

Answer. Adult female cicadas may damage young trees when females lay their eggs in softer branches. This may kill the branch, but should not kill the whole tree. Both male and female cicadas feed on plant juices but their feeding should not damage your trees.



Image from the Ohio State University

Damaged branch from egg laying

Question. Should I protect my trees by spraying insecticides?

Answer. No, spraying insecticides to kill cicadas will not be effective and may cause harm to beneficial insects. If you want to protect your ornamental shrubs or fruit trees, you can establish a mechanical barrier by wrapping the softer branches with cheesecloth or plastic netting. Be sure to secure the bottom of the netting around the trunk. This may prevent the female from laying her eggs in your tree.



Image from the University of Cincinnati

Young tree wrapped in netting

Question. How long will the adults live?

Answer. Adult cicadas will live from 4 to 6 weeks.

Question. Where do they live for the other 16 years?

Answer. After the females lay eggs in tree branches, miniature cicadas will hatch, fall to the ground and burrow into the soil. This is where they will spend the next 16 years.

Question. With millions of cicadas flying around, what eats them?



Image from Texas A&M

Cicada Killer Wasp

Answer. Cicadas don't have specific predators other than a wasp called the cicada killer, but the cicada killer wasp will not make a dent in the overwhelming numbers of Brood X periodical cicadas. Birds, cats, dogs, and cars may take out a few as well, and they make great fishing bait. Pets will not be able to digest their hard outer skeleton and eating too many cicadas may make them sick or constipated.

Question. Are cicadas the same as locusts?

Answer: No. Many people call cicadas "locusts." True locusts are a type of grasshopper. Locusts are far more destructive than cicadas, eating all plant life in their path.



Image from University of Idaho

Grasshopper (Locust)

Question. What is that constant humming I hear that reminds me of a soundtrack from a bad 1960's science fiction movie?

Answer. The humming sound is the chorus of male periodical cicadas calling for female periodical cicadas. They make the sound by using specialized structures called tymbals which are found on the underside of the male body. The chorus is so loud that the songs may actually confuse or drive away predators that eat them.

Question. Where can I find more information on periodical cicadas?

Answer. You can find more information about periodical cicadas at the web sites listed below:

<http://www.urhome.umd.edu/newsdesk/scitech/cicadas.cfm>
http://insects.ummz.lsa.umich.edu/fauna/Michigan_Cicadas/Periodical/Index.html
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/2000/2137.html>
<http://www.hgic.umd.edu/pubs/online/hg43.pdf>