



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
EXTENSION

---

## **NEWS COLUMN**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION  
Fayette County  
118 North Sixth Street  
Vandalia, IL 62471  
618/283-2753

Source: James E. Appleby, 217-244-3431; jappleby@illinois.edu

News writer: Debra Levey Larson, 217-244-2880; dlarson@illinois.edu

### Get Ready, The 13-Year Cicadas Are Coming

URBANA – For the past 13 years, cicada nymphs have been underground, feeding on tree and shrub roots, but according to University of Illinois entomologist James Appleby, they will be emerging very soon, and when they do, you'll know it because you'll hear them singing.

“When the cicadas first emerge, they'll crawl to a tree trunk, fence post, or nearly any vertical object where their claws can get a firm grip,” Appleby said. “Then comes the transformation. A split will occur down the nymph's back and the winged adult cicada will draw itself out of the nymphal skin.”

From Kankakee southward throughout the forests of Illinois, billions of the Great Southern Brood of the 13-year cicada will begin to sing.

“The adult cicadas will fly about for a week or so, probably enjoying their freedom from the 13 years they spent in the ground,” Appleby said. “Then the male cicadas will begin singing to attract females. Some have described the song as a slow repetition of the word ‘pharaoh.’ When all the males sing at the same time, the sound is nearly deafening. It can get especially loud in older neighborhoods with mature trees, and in parks or other forested areas.”

Although cicadas aren't interested in evergreen trees, other than for resting, you'll see them near most other types of trees. “They're generalists,” Appleby said. “The adult cicadas feed by inserting their sharp beaks into tender areas of tree branches,” he said. The damage from this is insignificant.

“After the males mate with the females, the female cicada will insert its ovipositor into a tree branch and deposit eggs into the branch,” Appleby said. “The branch injury caused by the females depositing their eggs can be severe especially on younger trees. On older trees some consider it natural pruning.”

Appleby said that in new subdivisions where many new trees have been planted, it's likely that the soil has been disturbed enough from the construction that the cicadas will not be present.

“If you are concerned about preventing injury to young trees, cover the plants with a cloth netting to prevent access by the female cicadas,” Appleby said. Commercial growers with a young orchard can consult with their local Extension Office for the latest control measures. The good news is that cicadas don’t bite, and they provide a steady diet for raccoons, skunks, opossums, foxes, coyotes, some birds, and long ago, humans.

“American Indians feasted on cicadas,” Appleby said. “There is no reason that we shouldn’t consume cicadas today as a good source of protein.” Appleby plans to use olive oil in a frying pan and try some of the newly emerged soft adult cicadas, which he believes will be like eating soft-shelled crabs.

There are five broods of periodical cicadas in Illinois, but the 17-year, which occurs in northern Illinois and the Great Southern Brood, which appears every 13 years in areas south of Kankakee, are the most abundant.

The dog-day cicada, sometimes called the annual cicada, has a three- to five-year cycle that is staggered, so it appears every year.

“The dog-day cicada emerges in much smaller numbers so they don’t make nearly the volume and are not as noticeable,” Appleby said. “You can tell them apart because the dog-day cicada’s eyes, main wing veins, and body are green, while the 17-and 13-year cicadas both have dark red eyes, black bodies and orange main wing veins.”

The life span of the adult cicada is about 5 weeks. About the same time the adults die, the eggs that were deposited in the tree branches hatch. The young nymphs fall to the ground, burrow into the soil and the 13-year incubation period begins again.

Mark your calendar for May 2024.