



# National Agricultural Library

## *Ag Facts:* Periodical cicadas (17-year Locusts)

are Coming in 2004 if you live in DE, GA, IL, IN, KY, MD, MI, NC, NJ, NY, OH, PA, TN, VA, or WVA



### What are they anyway?

Around mid-May through late June cicadas (*Magicicada septendecim*) will be emerging. Cicadas are flying, plant-feeding insects of the Order Homoptera, which also contains groups such as the leafhoppers, aphids, and scale insects.

### What do they look like?

Adult cicadas tend to be large (a little over 1 inch with a wingspan of 3 inches). They have bright red eyes, are fat and black to dark brown. Most North American species have clear wings, held over the reddish brown to yellow abdomen.

### What do they eat and where do they live?

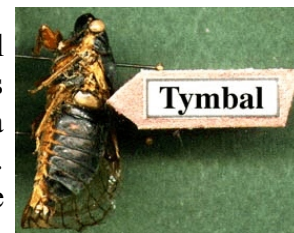
The sap of tree roots. They live in forests, near grasslands and pastures.

### Are they dangerous?

They do not sting or bite. When approached, a cicada will simply fly away. If handled, both males and females struggle to fly, and males make a loud defensive buzzing sound that may startle but is otherwise harmless. Cicadas are not poisonous or known to transmit disease. They can do damage to young trees if too many appear at the same time.

### What is all of that noise?

Male cicadas sing by using a pair of tymbals, or ridged membranes, found on the first abdominal segment. The abdomen of a male cicada is hollow and may act as a resonating chamber; the songs of individuals are loud, and singing large groups can be virtually deafening. Females of most cicada species do not have sound-producing organs. Cicadas usually sing in a sunny spot on sunny days. Between late April and early June both males and females get together in groups for the first couple of weeks to sing and mate.



### Where do they hide for 17 years?

The majority of their lives are spent underground in areas with lots of deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves in the fall). They live in large groups called broods. It takes 6-8 weeks for cicada eggs to hatch. Once they hatch, they bury themselves in search of a tree root to start feeding. These nymphs go through five stages of development before they re-emerge to the surface as adults. The simultaneous appearance of thousands of cicadas during a few weeks overwhelms predators, permitting the great majority to mate undisturbed. Cicada nymphs dig their way out of the soil during late May and June and climb up tree trunks, posts and poles. Each adult may live for 5 or 6 weeks.

## Trivia and useless facts about cicadas

Cicadas were eaten in ancient Greece, China, Malaya, Burma, Australia, North and South America and the Congo. They were used as a diuretic in France, a cure for ear-ache in China and a variety of medical purposes in Japan. Cicadas are mentioned in the Iliad by Homer about 10,000 BC.

Ancient Greeks and Chinese kept them in cages to hear them sing.

Periodical cicadas are also called "17-year locusts." Early American colonists had never seen periodical cicadas. When the cicadas appeared by the millions, some of these early colonists thought a "locust plague" like the biblical story of locust plagues in Egypt was happening to them.

Some American Indians thought their periodic appearance represented evil.

The confusion between cicadas and locusts exists today in that cicadas are commonly called locusts. The term "locust" is correctly applied only to certain species of grasshoppers.

## Fun Stuff:

Kid's Cicada Hunt: [saltthesandbox.org/cicada\\_hunt/](http://saltthesandbox.org/cicada_hunt/)

Cicada Mania: [www.dancentury.com/cicada/](http://www.dancentury.com/cicada/)

Bug Identification: [www.ex.ac.uk/bugclub/bugid.htm](http://www.ex.ac.uk/bugclub/bugid.htm)

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

### Gordon's cicada Page:

[www.earthlife.net/insects/cicadidae.html](http://www.earthlife.net/insects/cicadidae.html)

### University of Maryland Home and Garden Information Center: [www.hgic.umd.edu](http://www.hgic.umd.edu)

### Iowa State University Insect Image Gallery:

<http://www.ent.iastate.edu/imagegallery/>

### The University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, Insect Division:

[http://insects.ummz.lsa.umich.edu/fauna/michigan\\_cicada\\_s/Periodical/Index.html](http://insects.ummz.lsa.umich.edu/fauna/michigan_cicada_s/Periodical/Index.html)

### Periodical Cicada Emergence in Iowa in 1997:

<http://www.ent.iastate.edu/17cicada/>

### Penn State College, College of Agricultural Sciences, Entomological Notes, Periodical Cicada:

[http://www.ento.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/periodical\\_cicada.htm](http://www.ento.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/periodical_cicada.htm)



THE PERIODICAL CICADA, (*Cicada septendecim*).  
a. pupa; b. pupa with back split open and adult coming out; c. the same with adult almost out; d. empty pupa shell; e. adult wings spread; f. adult female in act of ovipositing; g. dwarf variety, showing comparative size. All about two-thirds natural sizes. (b and c after Riley.)

## Periodical Cicada Life Cycle

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