

This informational article was shared to us by our friends at Mariani Nursery in NE IL. Our research agrees with this information! Garden on!

Cicadas? Friend, Foe or just a nuisance?

For the past few years, our country has been bracing for 2024. We all knew it was coming, but as we get closer to the big event, it becomes more and more difficult to ignore. We're faced with increasingly negative news coverage and many of us, especially in the Midwest, wonder how the results will impact our industry, our families, and our daily lives. I'm referring to the cicadas, of course. (What did you think I was talking about?) This will be a historic spring because, for the first time in 221 years, two specific broods of cicadas (Broods XIII and XIX) will emerge at the same time. It's clear from conversations with customers in recent weeks that there is growing concern in our industry about how much of an effect the dual emergence of cicadas will have on sales this season. It doesn't help that the news and social media increasingly sensationalize the event with headlines like: "There's No Stopping Them: Cicadas Will Soon Take Over Illinois", "The Invasion is Coming!", and "Cicadageddon!". This practice of clickbait journalism does less to educate and inform the public and more to stoke unnecessary fear and apprehension about what is, for the most part, a fascinating and harmless natural phenomenon.

As we try to prepare for the impact on our industry, it's helpful to first understand cicada biology. Broadly speaking, there are two types of cicadas: annual and periodical. Annual cicadas, also known as dogday cicadas, emerge every year and occur naturally throughout the world, while periodical cicadas only emerge every 13 or 17 years and are unique to North America. There are only seven species of periodical cicadas, three of which have 17-year life cycles and four of which have 13-year life cycles. The 17-year cicadas generally have a more northern distribution while the 13-year broods are more southern, although their ranges do overlap considerably in the central part of the country. In their juvenile stage of growth, the periodical cicada nymphs feed underground on plant roots until they emerge from the soil (13 or 17 years later) and metamorphosize into winged adults. Specifically, the juveniles emerge at night when soil temperatures reach 64°F. After all this, adult cicadas only live for three to four weeks – just enough time to mate, lay their eggs, and die. But just how rare is the 2024 cicada emergence? To put it in perspective, this will be the first time since 2015 that a 13-year and a 17-year brood emerged in the same year and the first time since 1998 that adjacent 13-year and 17-year broods emerged together. A dual emergence of adjacent broods like we'll see this year typically occurs once every 25 years. So, 2024 will certainly be special, but this is an event that most of us will experience more than once in a lifetime. Regardless of their historical significance, I think we all have some level of concern when it comes to just how much the cicadas will negatively impact sales. Much of this comes down to public perception about how much of a threat cicadas are to plants, and that's why our messaging matters so much. We know that the damage to established trees and shrubs will be minimal, while the greatest threat is to young trees since females deposit their eggs in the slits of twigs and small branches. Some of our local garden centers have been ahead of the curve when it comes to educating their customers by creating instructive content for Instagram and Facebook that offers information like how to wrap and protect young trees. By taking this type of approach, we can turn a difficult situation into an opportunity to engage with our customers – present and future. After all, kids who experience this event will most likely remember it for the rest of their lives. The possibilities are endless when it comes to cicada-related activities for children that may inspire them to learn more about nature.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have seen some large horticultural institutions and state agencies issue warnings against planting any new trees before fall. We feel that blanket statements like this are not only largely unnecessary, but can be detrimental to our industry. For one thing, the two broods will only overlap in one small area in central Illinois. Since there is no significant overlap, researchers say we shouldn't expect areas of increased densities of cicadas beyond what we see in any other emergence year. Cicada populations will also be patchy; it's important to remember that



juvenile cicadas require a food supply of sap from tree and shrub roots for 13 to 17 years to stay alive, so populations will be sparse in places like new housing developments and areas near prairies and farm fields. When you also consider that cicadas typically only fly less than half a mile from where they emerged, it's clear that our communities will be affected to differing degrees depending on where we live. Situations like this underscore the importance of our industry trade associations. If we can work with state agencies, botanic gardens, and arboretums to create messaging that is accurate and educational without causing harm to our industry, it will benefit all of us. To be clear, we're not saying that our lives and businesses won't be disrupted for a few weeks this spring. Cicadas are a nuisance: they're loud, they're messy, and they can make going outside uncomfortable. But, as with most things in life that are