

CICADA-PALOOZA

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Staff Reporter

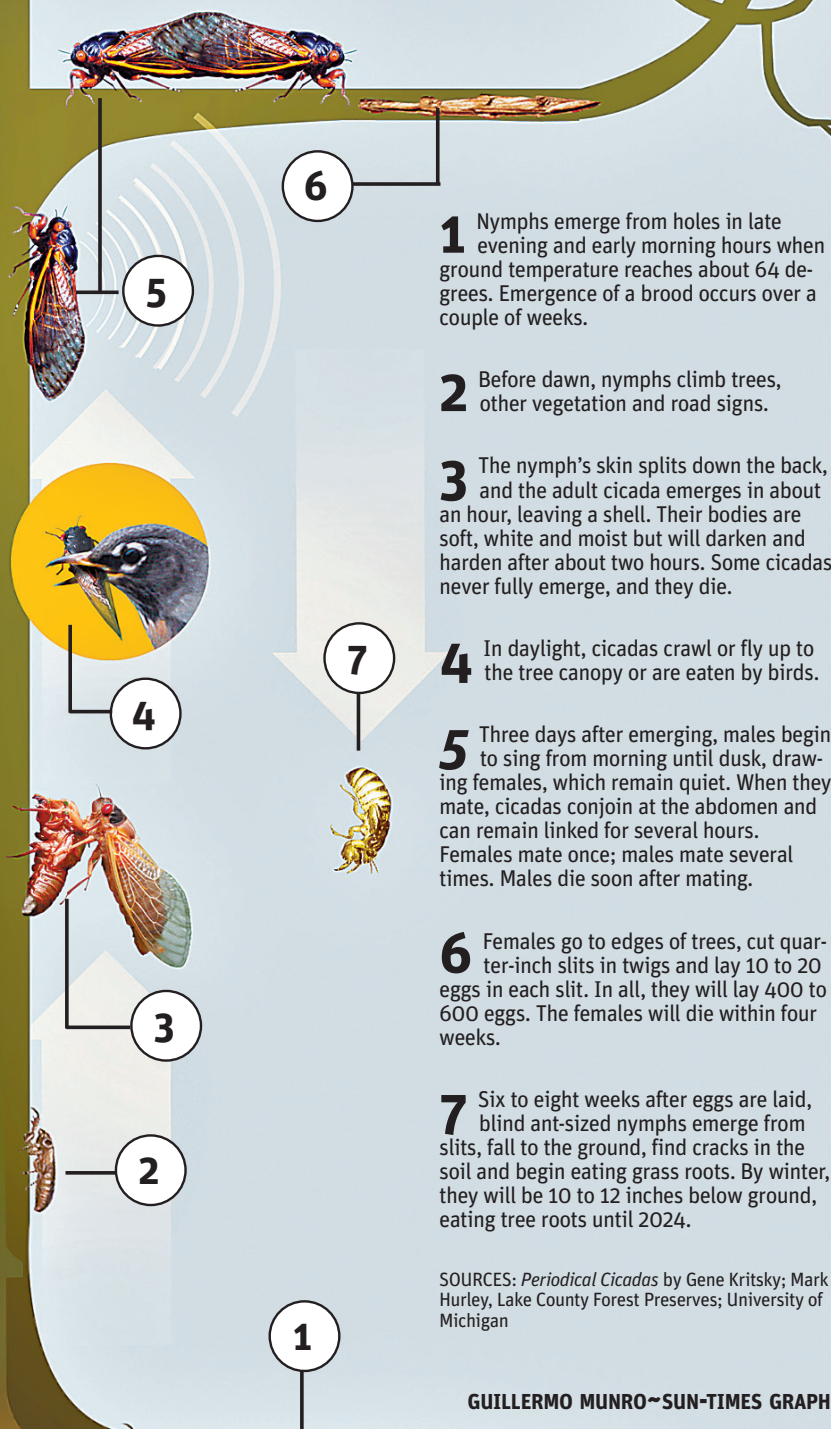
Cicada walks into a bar and orders a Bloody Mary. The bartender says: "Sorry, we only serve Grasshoppers here."

OK. So you have time to come up with a better one. But not much time.

Some experts predict the 17-year cicadas will emerge this week, possibly late Monday or early Tuesday, though chilly weather may delay their arrival by a few days.

"It's a bit of a mystery," said Mark Hurley, environmental educator with the Lake County Forest Preserves.

Here's what to look for:



1 Nymphs emerge from holes in late evening and early morning hours when ground temperature reaches about 64 degrees. Emergence of a brood occurs over a couple of weeks.

2 Before dawn, nymphs climb trees, other vegetation and road signs.

3 The nymph's skin splits down the back, and the adult cicada emerges in about an hour, leaving a shell. Their bodies are soft, white and moist but will darken and harden after about two hours. Some cicadas never fully emerge, and they die.

4 In daylight, cicadas crawl or fly up to the tree canopy or are eaten by birds.

5 Three days after emerging, males begin to sing from morning until dusk, drawing females, which remain quiet. When they mate, cicadas conjoin at the abdomen and can remain linked for several hours. Females mate once; males mate several times. Males die soon after mating.

6 Females go to edges of trees, cut quarter-inch slits in twigs and lay 10 to 20 eggs in each slit. In all, they will lay 400 to 600 eggs. The females will die within four weeks.

7 Six to eight weeks after eggs are laid, blind ant-sized nymphs emerge from slits, fall to the ground, find cracks in the soil and begin eating grass roots. By winter, they will be 10 to 12 inches below ground, eating tree roots until 2024.

SOURCES: *Periodical Cicadas* by Gene Kritsky; Mark Hurley, Lake County Forest Preserves; University of Michigan

GUILLERMO MUNRO~SUN-TIMES GRAPHIC

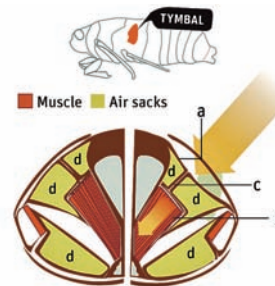
LOVE ME DO

The cicada's noise, made by males to attract females, is created by tymbals (a) located on the sides of the first abdominal segment, near the top just behind where the hindwings attach. Each tymbal is moved by a large muscle (b), causing the tymbal surface to bend inward, which produces a vibrating click.

A connecting strut (c) relaxes to return the tymbal to rest. These vibrating clicking noises are enhanced by large air sacs (d).

A female chooses the male that interests it with a flick of its wings, which stimulates the male to come closer. Periodical cicadas do not sing at night.

At 104 to 106 decibels, cicadas are louder than a motorcycle (100 decibels) but quieter than a rock concert (120 decibels).



ILLINOIS FORECAST



SOURCE: University of Illinois Extension

WHAT, US WORRY?

Q. Will the cicadas hurt me?

A. No. They don't bite or sting defensively, and they are not toxic or poisonous. They do have prickly feet.

Q. What can I do to protect my house and car?

A. Not much, but the cicadas don't pose much danger to either, except for a little bug juice. Their dead bodies will help fertilize your yard.

Q. Will cicadas chew up my plants and flowers?

A. No, cicadas do not chew – they have no chewing mouthparts. Cicadas have little interest in these plants.

Q. Can cicadas see?

A. Yes, cicadas have very good vision. They have five eyes. Their two red primary eyes turn brown shortly before they die.

Q. Why 17 years?

A. Scientists believe the interval prevents any primary predators from developing, though birds and squirrels find them tasty.

Q. Are my kids and pets safe?

A. Pretty much, except for the rare possibility of choking on cicadas. Dogs and cats sometimes gorge on cicadas and end up vomiting.



PROTECTING TREES

Ornamental fruit or flowering trees less than 10 feet tall can be covered with netting or cheesecloth to prevent cicadas from laying eggs. Openings in the netting should be 1/4 to 1/2 inch or less.

Place netting carefully over the top of tree. Fasten it securely to the trunk just below the lowest branch using twine or jute to stop cicadas from climbing the trunk. Most garden centers and home improvement stores sell netting.

The egg-laying process can cause the tips of branches to turn brown and die. Large trees should have no problem recovering. Smaller trees can suffer minor damage, and the slits caused by female cicadas can make the tree susceptible to disease. Cicadas naturally avoid evergreens.

SOURCES: USDA; www.reston.org

