

Spotted lanternfly has spread to Illinois, threatening trees and crops

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A smashed spotted lanternfly sits on the ground in New York, Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022. The Illinois Department of Agriculture said a sighting of one of the winged adult insects was reported on Sept. 16, 2023, at an undisclosed location in the state. Department staffers visited that area and found a “moderately populated area of spotted lanternfly,” the state agency said. Credit: AP Photo, File

Illinois is the latest state to find invasive spotted lanternflies, an winged insect that's spreading across the eastern U.S. and is subject to squish-on-sight requests in New York and elsewhere.

First detected in the U.S. nearly a decade ago, the hitchhiking pest and its eggs have been getting rides on vehicles and trains as they expand from southeast Pennsylvania across the country.

Although the inch-long planthopper looks pretty with its distinctive black spots and bright red wing markings, the sap-sucking bug likes to mass and feed on plants. It then excretes a sticky, sugary waste called honeydew that attracts insects and a form of sooty mold that can finish off the already weakened plants, posing a danger to crops and [native trees](#). The gunk can also collect houses, decks and outdoor furniture.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture said a sighting of one of the winged adult insects was reported on Sept. 16 at an undisclosed location. Department staffers visited that area and found a "moderately populated area of spotted lanternfly." After collecting specimens, officials [confirmed Tuesday](#) they are the first spotted lanternflies identified in the state.

In Illinois, they're not expected to cause "widespread plant or tree death" but will likely become a nuisance pest that "may have some impact on the agritourism industry, including orchards, pumpkin patches, and vineyards," said Scott Schirmer, Illinois Department of Agriculture's Nursery and Northern Field Office Section Manager.

Anyone who sees the insects is encouraged to smash them or scrape the egg masses into a container with hand sanitizer or rubbing alcohol to kill them.

Native to eastern Asia, they've previously been confirmed in Indiana,

Michigan and Ohio, as well as parts of the southeastern U.S.

"Spotted lanternfly has been inching closer to the Midwest and Illinois for close to a decade," said Jerry Costello II, director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, in a statement.

The public can help track the insects by reporting any sightings, including photos, to lanternfly@illinois.edu.

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