

A Modern Plague? Massive Infestation Creeps Across the United States

A growing wave of concern is spreading across the eastern United States as officials warn that spotted lanternflies are poised for another explosive season, reviving fears of a destructive invasion that many residents are already comparing to a modern-day plague.

The invasive insect, first discovered in Pennsylvania in 2014, has now spread across large portions of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, threatening vineyards, orchards, hardwood trees and agricultural economies. State agencies and researchers say the pest is advancing rapidly through human travel corridors and urban centers.

The comparison to biblical plagues has intensified online as images of swarms covering trees, sidewalks and buildings circulate across social media. While the insects pose no direct threat to humans, experts say their sheer numbers and aggressive spread have transformed them into a national nuisance with major agricultural consequences.



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The New York Post reported that New York City is "bracing for a resurgence" after a temporary decline in sightings, noting that the insects have now spread into nearly half of New York's counties.

Officials in North Carolina warned the insect "poses a serious threat" to grape and wine industries and can damage more than 100 species of plants.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the spotted lanternfly “has spread so much faster than a lot of invasives” seen in the past, highlighting how quickly the infestation has moved across state lines.

Current infestation zones or confirmed reproducing populations now include Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia, according to multiple state agriculture agencies.

Agriculture officials say the insects feed on sap from trees and crops while leaving behind a sticky residue known as honeydew that promotes black mold growth and weakens plants. Pennsylvania officials warned the pest causes “serious damage” to crops and trees across quarantine zones.

The insects’ rapid spread has sparked renewed calls for aggressive containment efforts, including quarantines, egg-mass destruction and public reporting campaigns. Scientists are also exploring biological controls as the United States braces for another summer battling one of the fastest-spreading invasive species in recent memory.

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