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Don't look now, but the locusts are coming

Ever since the beginning of time people have feared the locusts.

The Bible records a scourge of locusts that ate everything in sight. In American history the Mormons watched as clouds of locusts descended on their crops fearing ruin and then cheered as sea gulls arrived to devour them. There is now a monument to the sea gull in Salt Lake City.

This year we have been warned that the 17-year locust will make its appearance in our area. The good news is that these insects are not locusts at all, but periodical cicadas who hold no threat for us or our gardens.

The periodical cicada gets its name because it spends most of its life underground and emerges suddenly in the spring every 13 or 17 years de-

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Between
The Rows

pending on which particular species it belongs to. Sometime in June, millions of these immature insects, still in the nymph stage, will dig through the last inch of soil, head for upright objects such as trees and shrubs or even blades of grass. There they will secure themselves and shed their skins and become adults.

They are not very attractive. Their black bodies are just over an inch and a half long, with orange veining

in their wings and red eyes. Then the adult males begin to sing and continue to sing their loud droning song for six weeks until they come to the end of their life cycle and die.

During their adult life they do very little feeding. Unlike the grasshoppers which chew, cicadas are sucking insects. They may insert their beak into bark of trees and shrubs and drink plant juices, but they do not eat foliage and their feeding causes very little damage.

The adults mate within a week and less than two weeks after emerging, the females begin laying eggs. Adult females do the most harm to plants because they puncture twigs and limbs of trees and shrubs creating five to 20 egg pockets on each where they deposit their eggs. After six or seven weeks, when the adults are al-

ready dead, the eggs hatch and the nymphs fall to the ground and burrow as deep as 24 inches into the soil.

There, they look for roots from which they can suck juices until they are ready to emerge. Several weeks before they emerge the cicadas start burrowing upwards and wait an inch below the surface until conditions are right for them to make that final leg of the trip.

I once visited my brother in New Jersey when he was enduring an infestation of cicadas. There were thousands of the ugly bugs in his yard which did not make sitting on the patio very pleasant and he said their endless singing was going to drive him crazy. But that was the worst of it — and it only goes on for six weeks.

Radon quickly becoming household problem