

Before you begin

Butterflies do not have an immune system at any stage of their development, so everything must be kept very clean. Hands should be washed well before handling containers.

Please keep tubs out of direct sunlight at all stages of development, to avoid overheating.

Caterpillar Stage

The caterpillars are 5 to 7 days old when they arrive. They will spend their entire larval stage in their food containers. They are eating a special scientific diet, consisting mainly of soy and wheat, with added vitamins and minerals. You will notice there are times when the caterpillars are very active and times when they are quite still. When they are inactive it may be a sign that they are shedding their skin. They are especially vulnerable at this time and the containers should be handled gently. You may notice quite a lot of webbing inside the containers during the second week, this is perfectly normal.

The length of time for this stage of development depends on the temperature in the room. Warmer speeds up development, cooler slows it down. Expect the caterpillar stage to take an additional 7 to 14 days after your caterpillars arrive.

When the caterpillars are ready to pupate, you will notice them hanging from the paper in a 'J' shape. Within 24 hours you will have a chrysalis.

Chrysalis stage

When the last caterpillar in the container changes to form a chrysalis, wait a further 24 hours before removing. If you need to leave the chrysalides in the container for a few days, that's fine, it won't hurt them.

If you have the netted butterfly cage, place the cage so that the clear plastic window is at the top of the cage. The bottom and sides will be netting. Remove the chrysalides by gently pulling them away from the paper. Next, place them inside the bottom of the cage, it can be turned to a vertical position once the butterflies have all emerged.

If you are using a terrarium type container, pin or tape the paper holding the chrysalides inside the top of the cage, so they are hanging. This method can also be used for the netted cage if you prefer.

It is normal for the chrysalides to shake when disturbed. This response will change from time to time. Don't worry if they do stop this response, they are still fine.

Because indoor air can be dry, it is important to spray the chrysalides with a fine mist of water at least 3 times a day. It won't hurt them to skip the misting on the weekend if they are misted during the week. Please make sure the spray bottle is new and has never contained any chemicals.

Again, the length of time it takes for this stage of development depends on the temperature, expect about 7 to 14 days.

Butterfly

About 24 hours before your butterflies emerge you will notice the chrysalides turn very dark. On close examination you will see speckles of orange which are the wing colours showing through. Once the chrysalides have turned dark, just mist around the cage, not directly on the chrysalides as they lose their water-proof protection when they turn dark.

Butterflies will most often emerge in the morning. When they emerge their wings will be crumpled. The newly emerged butterfly will be able to grip the netting and climb up the side of the cage to hang. Butterflies must hang and dry their wings or they will be unable to fly.

Shortly after a butterfly emerges it will release a red liquid. Don't be alarmed, it's just butterfly waste and will diminish over the next few days. The butterflies will enjoy being misted a few times a day with water.

To feed butterflies, cut and place a round of sliced orange in the cage, or use a Gatorade soaked paper towel or cotton balls, and change daily. Be sure to use a full sugar Gatorade, the butterflies need sugar for energy.

The butterflies will not eat for the first 24 hours after they emerge.

Please keep the cage out of direct sunlight.

The Release

The children will enjoy observing the butterflies for a few days or so. Then it will be time to release them. They will live for about 3 weeks as adult butterflies.

When you release the butterflies, make sure it's a nice warm day, they won't fly below 16 degrees Celsius, or in the rain. Watch out for birds. If you see a flock of birds in the air, just wait until they pass, many birds will eat butterflies.

Cleaning the mesh cage:

Once the butterflies have been released, spray the cage with a mixture of mild detergent and water, let soak for a few minutes, then rinse well. Make a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water and spray over the cage. Let it soak for a few minutes, then rise. The cage will be clean and sanitized. When dry, it can be folded flat and stored away.

Caterpillar Fun Facts:

Like all insects, a caterpillar has six true legs, just as it will as a butterfly. All the other legs that you see are actually false legs, which help them to climb and hold onto a surface.

A caterpillar will shed (molt) its skin five times before it becomes a chrysalis.

Caterpillars produce silk using glands along the sides of their mouth. They use their silk to attach themselves to a surface when they shed their skin, and especially when they change into a chrysalis.

A few fun facts about butterflies:

Butterflies can't chew or bite food, they eat a liquid diet only. They have long tube-like tongue that works just like a straw to drink the nectar from flowers and juice from fruit. Their tongue is called a proboscis.

Butterflies can see colors that we can't. They are able to see ultraviolet light, which we cannot see with our eyes.

Insects have six legs right? So why do I only see four legs? Butterflies have two smaller legs tucked up near their head. These special legs have sensors used for tasting. The female butterflies use these special legs to taste the plant they want to lay their eggs on, and make sure it will be suitable food for their caterpillars.

Butterflies are very important pollinators. We all know how important bees are as pollinators, but butterflies are able to pollinate some flowers that bees are not attracted to.



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