



Butterfly Eggs



Butterfly eggs are very small, and look interesting under a microscope. Eggs are laid on the undersides of leaves for protection. Those leaves belong to plants that will become food for the caterpillar until it becomes a pupa. Some caterpillars feed on only one type of plant, while others feed on several types of plants.



Butterfly Larva



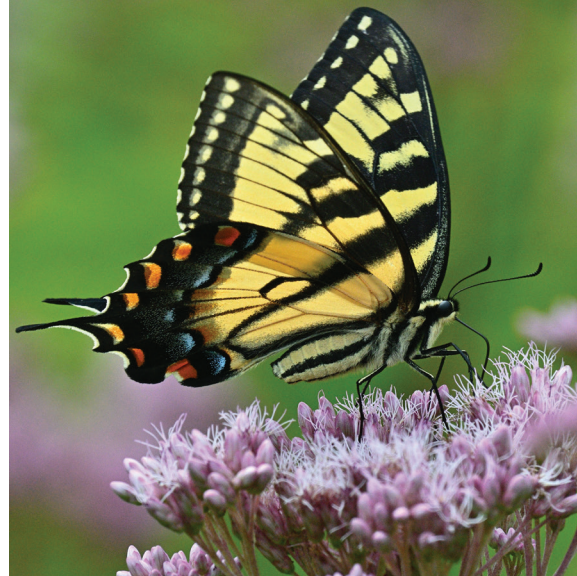
Eggs hatch into tiny larvae called caterpillars after a few days or weeks. A caterpillar must eat as much as it can and may molt the exoskeleton three to five times and grow up to 100 times its original size. Some grow up to five inches or more! Many caterpillars slowly change color as they age, so very young larvae and mature larvae may look completely different.



Butterfly Pupa



Grown caterpillars find a safe place to form a hardened chrysalis which protects them during pupation. This might be on a branch, in dead leaves, or in the ground. The caterpillar undergoes a major rebuilding in this stage. Digestive enzymes dissolve most of the tissues (except for important bits like the digestive system) to form all the parts an adult butterfly will need.



Butterfly Imago



After one to three weeks the chrysalis cracks open and the wrinkly butterfly crawls out to dry off and fill out its wings. When it is ready, it will fly away to eat nectar and find a mate. Butterflies use a proboscis to draw nectar from flowers and overripe fruits. Females give off a chemical scent, or hormone, that draws males to them. Then the cycle starts over again as they lay eggs. The largest butterfly is 10.5 inches from wingtip to wingtip!