

How to Raise a Monarch Butterfly

You can watch butterfly metamorphosis in your own home. It's a great educational activity for kids – and for adults of all ages! It also may help increase the chances of survival for the caterpillar, since you're protecting it from hungry predators outside.

Follow the steps below , and enjoy!
(Remember to minimize handling of the animal as much as possible.)

Step 1. Find an egg on a milkweed plant in June, July, or August. Look on the underside of the leaves for a distinctive, raised dot that is a creamy white color.



Step 2. Pinch off the leaf, and bring it inside. Put the leaf in a container with some water, to keep the leaf hydrated while the egg develops.



Step 3. Watch the egg hatch into a tiny little black line.
Within a few days of hatching, it will look like this:



Step 4. Watch it grow! You will start to see the caterpillar eating the milkweed leaf. As the leaf dries out or gets eaten away, replace it with a new leaf from the milkweed plant. Once the caterpillar starts eating, there is no need to keep the leaf hydrated, as it won't last long.



A note about caterpillar poop: Your caterpillar will make a tiny little mess underneath its leaf. It's harmless, but you may want to put the container within a larger container, to contain the mess.

Step 5. Keep watching and feeding. It will go through leaves fast as it gets bigger. Eventually, it will reach the size of your pinky finger. When it is ready to form its chrysalis, the caterpillar will appear to get restless. It will roam around and look for a sturdy, horizontal surface. It's helpful to place a stick with horizontal branches in the container (do this before it reaches full size), to provide it some room to roam. And then....



The letter J appears! This will happen about two weeks after the egg has hatched.



Step 6. This is the really cool part. The J will hang there for a while, then it will start to wriggle, and then it will work itself into a beautiful, bright green chrysalis with a line of brilliant gold near the top.



Step 7. Some crazy stuff is happening inside the chrysalis, as the caterpillar essentially dissolves into a bag of goo and then rearranges itself into a butterfly. After a few weeks, the chrysalis turns black, and out comes.....



Step 8. Let the newly emerged butterfly sit for a few hours, while it stretches and dries its wings. Then bring the entire container outside and nestle it next to a milkweed plant. When the butterfly is ready, it will fly to the plant.



Mexico, here I come!

