

Monarch Caterpillar Stages

Your caterpillar will grow about 2,000 times his original size in just about two weeks! As he gets bigger and bigger he is going to molt. Molting is when the caterpillar sheds his skin, kind of like a snake. He will actually walk right out of it. He may also turn around and eat his molt.

Each time your caterpillar prepares to molt he will often leave his leaf or stay put and be very still for many hours, sometimes a full day. Don't worry! He's just concentrating on this big task. Do not disturb him. After his molt he will be back to munching on his leaf in no time. Handle your caterpillar as little as possible. If you must touch him make sure to wash your hands before and after.

How Often Do I Feed My Monarch Caterpillar?

Make sure he always has a fresh leaf. You may have to replace or add a leaf once or twice a day. As you replace/add leaves, change out the paper towel at the bottom to keep the container clean. Do not disturb the container if your caterpillar is hanging out on the lid. Wait until he starts moving again to open the container. You never want to chance interrupting a molt as this can be deadly for your caterpillar.



Closer to Butterfly

Once your caterpillar is full size, about two inches long, at some point he will head to the

top of his container. He will stop eating and will stay on the top for about 24 hours building his silk mat. He will use this silk to hang upside down in what is called a "J" position. Do not disturb him during any of

this process. Be sure he is in a place where no one will knock his container. Once he goes into his "J" position, within 24 hours he will turn into a chrysalis



(pupate.) After 24-36 hours the chrysalis will harden and is safe to handle gently.

The chrysalis will need to be moved to a



location where the butterfly can emerge safely. This will happen in 10-14 days. An all mesh laundry hamper that zips on two sides works great. Once the chrysalis is hardened, remove the footie (or paper towel or mesh

fabric) and pin it to the top of the mesh container. Be careful not to pull the chrysalis.



Newly emerged butterfly surrounded by other chrysalis.

When your butterfly emerges, he will need to hang for 4-6 hours undisturbed as his wings straighten and dry out. This is critical

so he can fly. It is rare, but possible, your new butterfly will fall as he emerges. He needs to be able to climb back up to dry. Butterflies cannot climb glass or plastic. If your container is either, attach paper towels to the sides before he comes out.

During the drying process the butterfly will drip a few drops of rust colored liquid. Don't worry, this is normal. After 4-6 hours release your butterfly as long as it is above 50 degrees and not raining.

Congratulations on your first monarch!

**Photos by Lisa Hartlund, Washington County Master Gardener*

Resources

Monarchwatch.org

Monarchbutterfly.net

Monarchlab.org
(University of Minnesota)

Learner.org/jnorth
(Journey North: A Global Study of Wildlife Migration and Seasonal Change)

Consider joining these monarch rearing groups on Facebook!

*The Beautiful Monarch
Monarch Madness in Wisconsin*

For more information contact:

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How to Raise Your First Monarch Butterfly



In Wisconsin and east of the Rocky Mountains, we have the unique opportunity to raise migrating monarch butterflies. Butterflies emerging in late August and September are likely monarchs that will make the 1,500 mile journey to overwinter in Mexico. Exciting stuff! This guide will give you the basics to get your little migrator or migrator parent from egg to butterfly.

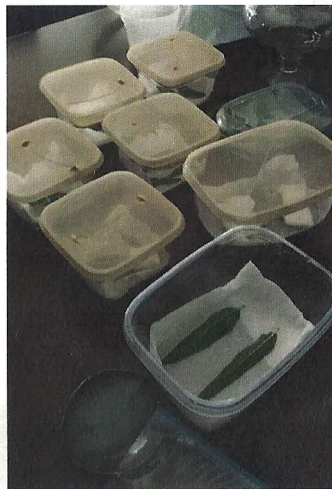
What do I need to raise a monarch?

Raising a monarch is a fairly inexpensive endeavor sure to entertain and educate your entire family. You'll need the following to get him from egg to flying off your finger:

1. Access to chemical free milkweed. Common and swamp milkweed (*asclepias syriaca* and *asclepias incarnata*) are some of the most

common in Wisconsin. If you pick milkweed in the wild stay away from residential areas, farms and businesses where they may spray herbicides or pesticides that could contaminate the milkweed. You can pick leaves, rinse well and keep in the refrigerator in a plastic baggie for several days to use. Remember milkweed is toxic, *do not get milkweed sap in your eyes*. It will burn and can cause temporary blindness. Wear gloves when picking milkweed.

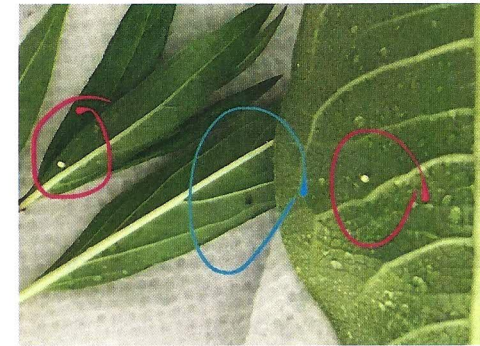
2. A habitat. Some use aquariums or mesh



habitats. One method is to use medium size plastic food containers and nylon footies as a lid. Some use paper towels or mesh fabric held on with rubber bands. Never keep your monarch caterpillar's container in direct sunlight.

3. White paper towels to line the bottom of your caterpillar house. As the caterpillar gets bigger and bigger he will leave more and more frass (caterpillar poop!) and you'll need to change out the paper towel daily to keep his area clean.
4. Squirt bottle of water to spritz your milkweed leaf to keep it fresh longer.

How do I find a monarch egg or caterpillar?



Monarch caterpillar eggs. Circled in blue is about to hatch!

Monarch eggs are only found on milkweed. They are very small white dots that come to a slight point at the top. Typically there are only one or two on a leaf. Look on the underside of the leaves of younger, smaller milkweed plants. Momma monarchs seek out these young plants because the tender leaves are easier for their babies to eat.

I found one! Now what?

Take the whole leaf your egg is on and place it on a slightly damp white paper towel in a plastic food container with a regular lid (Newborn caterpillars are the size of a piece of rice and could escape a mesh habitat. Open the container twice a day to give it enough air.) Lightly spritz your leaf with water to keep it fresh until your egg hatches (3-5 days.) When your egg is about to hatch



the top will turn black. That is his head! When he comes out he may turn around and eat his egg shell as his first meal.