

# Care of Larvae and Butterflies

## PROCEDURE

- When ordering your butterfly larvae, **it is best if the delivery date is early in the week** to make sure that the children are able to get the larvae and their fresh food moved into the growth habitats upon arrival. The habitats should be constructed ahead of time by the teacher.
- The larvae may arrive with a container of pasty food. **This may be used to supplement the fresh leaves we recommend using for this investigation.**
- When the larvae arrive, use a soft, small paintbrush to gently move 3–4 larvae into each team habitat. We anticipate that you may have 6 teams made up of 4 children per team. You may consider making an extra habitat for any larvae that remain.

## SAFETY

- The larvae are not harmful, but careless handling can injure them. Children will be handling the larvae daily for measurements. Model how to move them carefully by sliding a soft paintbrush or plastic spoon underneath them to lift them out of the habitat, then place them gently on a paper towel.
- If you are using the pasty food in addition to the fresh leaves, avoid direct contact of skin with the food as this can lead to mold growth on the food.
- Children should use care when adding fresh leaves to the habitats and wash their hands before and after.

## DAILY CARE: LARVA

- The larvae will eat a lot of fresh leaves daily—prepare to have a good stock on hand!
- It is not necessary to provide water because they will get the water they need from the fresh leaves.
- When larvae climb to the top of their chambers and remain there, chrysalis formation will take place shortly thereafter.
- When the chrysalises form, it is best not to move the habitats so that the chrysalises are not disturbed. They will remain in the chrysalis stage for 7–10 days.
- If a chrysalis falls, tie a piece of thread **onto the top of the chrysalis** (it is black and looks like a stem). Then tie the other end of the thread to a branch. **Try not to touch or handle the chrysalis itself.**
- Place the habitats in a safe location after the chrysalises form so they can still be observed.

## DAILY CARE: ADULT BUTTERFLIES

- It is possible that the butterflies will not emerge until after the unit is completed. However, children can continue to watch for this amazing event.
- When the butterflies emerge, a reddish liquid will be released. This is a waste product and not blood. The butterflies are fine, but the liquid, called *meconium*, is messy. Paper towels on the bottom of the habitat will help with this mess and will need to be removed after all butterflies have finished emerging.
- Put a small disposable Styrofoam™ or paper plate holding a slice of orange on the floor of the habitat. The butterflies will feed on the orange juice. Change out the orange slice every two days.

- Branches or plants such as mallow or milkweed (butterfly-garden plants from garden shops) can be placed inside the habitat. Besides looking nice, they will provide the emerging adult butterflies a place to land and possibly to lay eggs for the next generation.
- The butterflies will need some time to pump out their wrinkled wings before flying.
- If the air in your classroom is dry, use a spray bottle to spray water on the mesh window coverings to increase the humidity inside of it.
- If any butterflies escape from the habitat, they can easily be captured and returned. Wait until they land and gently surround them with the fingers of your hand but avoid touching them! If the butterflies flutter around the ceiling lights, turn the lights off and wait for the butterflies to descend to where they can be reached.
- About 2–4 days after all the butterflies have emerged, plan to release them in a garden area in warm, fair weather. Simply open the large window on the habitat and allow them to fly out.
- The adult butterflies will live for about 10 days to two weeks.
- Save the empty chrysalises for examination by the children using their hand lenses. If available, place several chrysalises inside plastic Petri dishes to protect them during examination.
- Dead butterflies can be saved and mounted for examination of their wings. Detailed instructions for mounting butterflies can be found on the Texas Agricultural Extension Service website:  
<http://www.butterflywebsite.com/articles/tamu/mountbutter.html>