

# Finding Monarch Eggs and Caterpillars: Raising Monarch Butterflies

Monarch Butterflies can be found in New England from late June to early September. During this time, you can find the eggs and caterpillars, and raise Monarch butterflies so that there will be even more to see.



Since the only food that Monarch caterpillars can eat is milkweed, the first thing you need to do is learn to recognize this plant and find some places where it is growing. If you are unsure whether or not a plant is milkweed, just break off a leaf and see if the liquid in the stem is sticky and looks like milk. (Be sure to wash your hands after touching the “milk”.)

Once you find milkweed, start looking for eggs and caterpillars. Butterflies lay single eggs, mostly on the undersides of the leaves. The eggs are very distinctive with ridges running down the side. They are a greenish-white, not bright white, and are pointed, not round. If you get good at spotting the eggs, you should be able to find a lot of them in the summer. When taking leaves with eggs or caterpillars on them, wrap the ends of the leaves in a wet paper towel so they stay fresh until the egg hatches or while the caterpillar eats it.



Out in the wild, few eggs hatch and make it all the way to becoming a butterfly, so you can really help by bringing them home and raising them where they will be safe from predators. When you release Monarchs at your house, you may even attract more to your area.

It usually takes only a day or two before the egg hatches. Just before the caterpillar comes out, the tip of the egg turns dark. This is the caterpillar’s head. It will eat its way out of the egg, eat the egg, and then go on an almost two-week eating binge during which time it grows about 6000 times in weight. Make sure to keep a fresh supply of milkweed leaves for your caterpillars.



Small caterpillars are also easy to find once you learn what to look for. (They do not look very much like what you might expect to see until they are about four days old, so be on the lookout for the tiny guys. They often make crescent-shaped holes in leaves that they are eating. As with the eggs, you almost always find the caterpillars on the undersides of leaves. If your milkweed has no holes in the leaves, butterflies may not be coming there to lay eggs.

One day old caterpillar

Two days old

Three days old



After about 12 days, the caterpillar will climb to the top of the container or to an underside of a leaf and attach itself with silk threads. It will then hang in the shape of the letter J for one night before forming a chrysalis. You should try and watch when the chrysalis forms. It is very exciting! For the next 12-14 days the caterpillar will change to become a butterfly inside the chrysalis. The night before the butterfly emerges, the chrysalis will turn black and you can see the wings through the side of the chrysalis. The next morning, the butterfly will emerge. Be careful with its wings as they need to straighten out so that it can fly right. By the afternoon, you should be able to take it outside and place it in a tree or on a bush. It may even fly off of your hand on its own! Good luck.