

Magnuson Nature Programs

All About Butterflies



What is a butterfly?

Butterflies are arthropods, meaning they have an exoskeleton or an outer shell that gives them their shape and provides protection to the soft parts on the inside.

Arthropods have jointed legs. Arthropods with six jointed legs are part of the insect family.

Butterflies are cold blooded, which means that their inside temperature varies according to the temperature around them. A butterfly's muscles work best when the temperature is between 80-100 degrees. When it's colder than that, they can't move very quickly and can become a tasty meal for another animal, like a bird or lizard. When it's cold outside, butterflies hide. They can also raise their body temperature by basking in the sun. Butterflies will spread their wings to collect as much heat as possible and can raise their body temperature by 10-15 degrees.

How many kinds of butterflies are there?

There are about 10,000 species of butterflies on earth. About 170-180 species of butterflies are found in the state of Washington.

Like humans, there are both male and female butterflies.

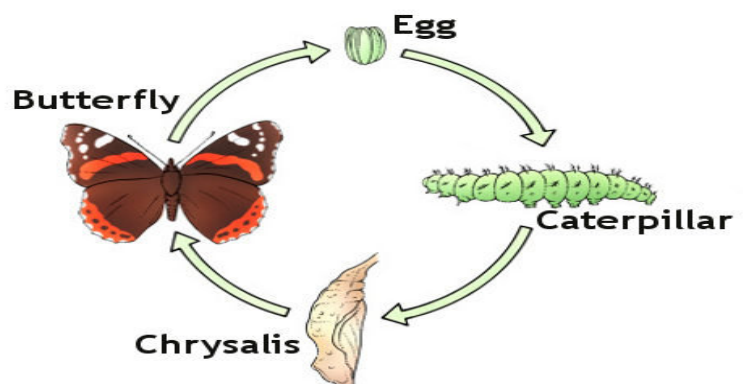
Butterflies develop in four stages: Egg, Caterpillar (Larva), Pupa (Chrysalis), and Adult.

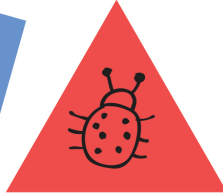
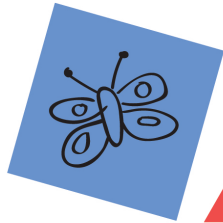
Stage 1 – Tiny eggs are laid by a female butterfly on the leaves or stems of plants. A butterfly lays eggs on a plant that her babies will want to eat when they hatch. Once the eggs are laid, the babies are on their own, so butterflies pick the best spot they can find for their eggs.

Stage 2 – The eggs hatch and the larvae enter the world during the second stage. Larvae are also known as caterpillars. Caterpillars spend most of their time eating, sleeping and growing! Most caterpillars eat plant leaves, but some can eat insects.

Stage 3 – When the caterpillar reaches its full size, it looks for a safe place for pupation. The caterpillar makes a cocoon and then will stay inside of the cocoon until its wings are fully developed.

Stage 4 – The final stage is the adult stage. A butterfly emerges from the cocoon when its wings are fully developed, but can't fly until its wings dry.





Magnuson Nature Programs



Can you tell the difference between a butterfly and a moth?

- Butterflies have knobs on the end of their antennae
- The antennae of moths taper to a point
- Unlike moths, butterflies seldom fly at



Can you count my wings?

- Butterflies have 4 wings and 6 legs that are attached to its thorax. The thorax has muscles that make the wings and legs move.
- A butterfly's wings are covered by overlapping scales that look similar to the shingles on the roof of a house.
- Butterflies don't breathe through their mouth. They have holes or pores along their thorax for breathing. If a butterfly's abdomen stays under water, it will drown.

What do butterflies eat?

The most important food for a butterfly is nectar, but they also eat rotting fruit, plant sap, decaying organic matter, and minerals that they find in mud.

Do butterflies have mouths?

Yes. A butterfly's mouth is a flexible, hollow tube that it keeps tightly tucked under its head.

A butterfly's mouth tube can be straightened and extended to reach nectar, or to suck plant sap or water.

Butterflies can't breathe through their mouth tubes. Butterflies have pores or holes in their thorax that they use for breathing.

Butterflies don't see the way we do. A butterfly's eyes are good at seeing motion, but they can't see clear, detailed images. They're really great at seeing color, even colors that people can't see!

