

# Munching Caterpillars



Watching a caterpillar feed, grow, pupate and finally emerge as a butterfly or moth is to witness one of nature's miracles. Use this guide to help you find and rear caterpillars...

## STEP 1 FIND YOUR CATERPILLAR

**Caterpillars leave clues. Here are our top tips for successful caterpillar hunting:**

- 1 The spring and summer months are best for searching for caterpillars
- 2 Your garden or nearby green space is a great place to start. Look around patches of long grass, nettles, in hedgerows and of course – the vegetable patch!

**My poo is a clue**



- 3 Look for nibbled leaves or the tough 'skeletons' of leaves left behind – a good clue that a caterpillar is nearby
- 4 Caterpillars are poo machines! The pellet-like droppings are called 'frass' – if you want to be a real detective lay a newspaper under a hedge or shrubs and check back the next day to see if caterpillars are at home...

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY AND RESEARCH YOUR CATERPILLAR

Correctly identifying your caterpillar is really important so you can find out what it likes to eat and how it behaves when it is time for it to pupate. Find out how long you must wait before it will emerge as an adult butterfly or moth. You may have only a few weeks to wait – or it could spend the entire winter as a pupa.

It can be tough – there could be hundreds of different species living in your garden and they even change appearance as they grow, shedding their skins about five times! These different stages are called instars. Useful tools include our ID guide or 'Ask an Expert' photo upload at [munchingcaterpillars.org](http://munchingcaterpillars.org)



**An Orange-tip Caterpillar moults...**



**...as it grows**

## STEP 3: HOUSE YOUR CATERPILLAR

### Containers to avoid:

- 1 Glass jars – they get hot!
- 2 Small plastic tubs without holes – too much moisture or too little air is a bad idea for caterpillars

### Containers to use:

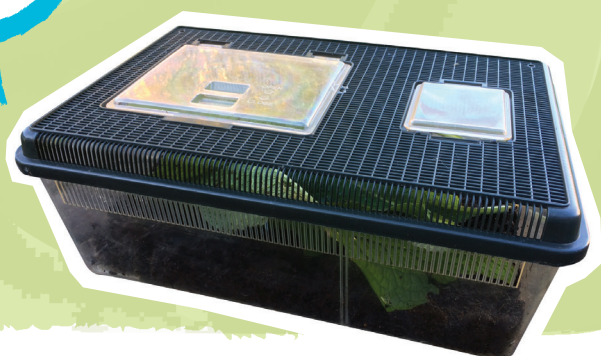
Most big plastic tubs or tanks are OK. A fine mesh lid is useful for helping caterpillars breathe and stopping the container getting too moist.

Most moth caterpillars bury themselves when they pupate – so raise them in a tank with a few

centimeters of peat free compost. Other species will attach themselves to a stem or twig, or hide in leaf litter – so place these in the container with them.

**We love it in here**

Don't house caterpillars in direct sunshine – find somewhere indoors with a regular temperature.



## STEP 4 FEED YOUR CATERPILLAR



**Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillars feed on Rosebay Willowherb**



**Red Admiral caterpillars love nettles**



**Large White caterpillars adore cabbages**

caterpillars as they are fragile. Instead, gently encourage them to move with a stick or paintbrush – or leave the stem they are on in the tank and just put fresh food close by. Avoid handling hairy caterpillars.

Caterpillars get most of their water from leaves but it is a good idea to drip or spray a small amount of water into their tank every few days. Lots of food means lots of poo! Remove it... you don't want things getting stinky in there!

Caterpillars want to munch! Some specialise in just one plant, some are less fussy. You need to change the leaves every couple of days, so having a fresh supply growing nearby is important. A live potted plant is a good idea – as is a wet foam block (like those used for flower arranging).

Take care not to disturb a moulting caterpillar when you refresh their leaves. In fact, it is best not to handle

## STEP 5: THE GREAT CHANGE

After a feeding frenzy, a caterpillar ready to pupate will march around looking for a good place to transform! Make sure you have provided what it needs (compost, twigs etc.) to do this happily.



Through your research you will have learned how long you will need to wait for the adult butterfly or moth to emerge. You might need to be patient – don't forget to keep an eye on it!



If you are going to keep an overwintering pupa, find somewhere with a constant temperature: dry but cold – like a shed... but make sure the butterfly or moth can escape outside when it emerges, you might not be watching!

**THANK YOU!**

When your butterfly or moth finally emerges it is a wonderful moment. You have just helped a creature through an incredible process called metamorphosis. Don't delay – now it is time to set it free, preferably where you found the caterpillar to begin with. Congratulations!



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[www.munchingcaterpillars.org](http://www.munchingcaterpillars.org)



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