GUIDE TO RAISING MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

Household Climate: 80 F is ideal. Below 70 F may result in loss of small "cats". Keep out of direct sunlight. They will spend most of their time on the under side of leaves. If humidity in your home is low, add a cotton ball with a small amount of water on it. If water droplets form on the sides of the container, humidity is too high. Wipe away excess water.

Care and Feeding: Wash hands before feeding, moving, or cleaning your caterpillar and its container. Remove droppings (frass). Monarchs eat only milkweed. Wash the leaves in 10% bleach solution, rinse very well and dry on paper towel before giving to caterpillars. The first week they do not eat a lot but the second week, they eat large amounts. Check food supply regularly. We suggest you rear them in containers at least 10x10x10". Paper toweling in the bottom of the container makes cleanup easier. Before reusing any container we suggest you disinfect the container by soaking in a 10% bleach solution for 20 mins. Rinse thoroughly several times before using again.

Handling Caterpillars: They must be handled carefully because they are easily injured. Handle as little as possible and wash your hands before moving them. Try one of these methods:

1. Tear off the section of food the caterpillar is sitting on and place it on a new leaf. The caterpillar will soon crawl onto the fresh food.
2. Place the tip of a fresh leaf under the "cats" head and gently wiggle the leaf until the "cat" is almost completely on the new leaf. Lift carefully and it will crawl on the rest of the leaf.
3. Using a small soft paintbrush, coax under the caterpillar as with the leaf.
4. Place a fresh food leaf on top of the caterpillar. It will most likely crawl onto the fresh food and you will be able to remove the old leaf.

If a "cat" has attached itself to the sides or top of the container and is very still, it is probably preparing to molt, and should not be disturbed. Neither should a freshly molted "cat" be moved away from its recently shed skin--it is probably planning to snack on it! Sometimes they do not eat for a whole day when molting.

Health Note: Keeping their environment clean will prevent most but not all illnesses. Remove any "cats" that have died or have changed color. Disinfect the chamber as suggested above with a 10% bleach solution, rinsing thoroughly. Transfer remaining "cats" into clean container. Add food, and watch closely for any more signs of illness. Some loss is normal, so you may loose a few in spite of your best efforts. We do not offer a refund or replacement for lepidoptera; eggs are guaranteed to hatch. The costs are low, the educational experience priceless, no matter the outcome. All livestock are deemed healthy at time of purchase.

Care of Chrysalis: Follow the lighting, temperature, and humidity guidelines stated above, and be patient. The caterpillar/butterfly will do the rest! If you need to remove a chrysalis for some reason, gently pry it from the container with a toothpick. Use a toothpick to pull the silken pad and chrysalis from the container. Use masking tape to secure the chrysalis with its silk to the top of the container. Wherever the chrysalis is placed, make sure the butterfly that will be emerging is able to climb upward and hang its wings vertically to expand and dry. You may provide a climbing surface by gluing or taping rough toweling on a side and across the top of the container. Climbing sticks may also be provided in the container leaving room for the wings.

Releasing your Butterfly: Wait until the wings have dried and stiffened and then take your rearing chamber outdoors to a sunny location, preferably near nectar-rich flowers. Open the container and the butterflies will fly away when ready. If you wish to pick up a butterfly, reach in from behind and grasp the closed wings near the body. Never pull a butterfly away from what it is grasping.

Editor's note: We hope you enjoy the process of watching your caterpillar grow into a beautiful adult butterfly. Please feel free to call us if you have any questions that have not been answered here.