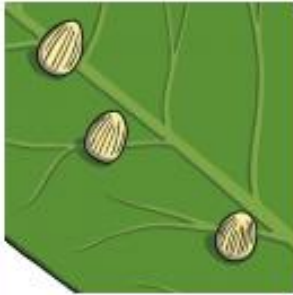


Butterfly Life Cycle

Butterflies have a complete life cycle with four separate stages.



What happens during the first stage?

During the first stage of the butterfly life cycle, the female butterfly lays her eggs onto a leaf, stem or another object. The new butterfly starts life as a very small egg. The eggs can be round, oval or cylindrical and some are ribbed. The shape depends on the type of butterfly that has laid the egg. If you look really closely, you can actually see the caterpillar growing inside the egg.



What happens during the second stage?

During the second stage, a caterpillar (or larva) hatches. It is the long, worm-like stage of the butterfly life cycle. Most caterpillars have interesting patterns, stripes or patches and sometimes spine-like hairs. In this stage, the caterpillar needs to eat lots to grow. The caterpillar usually starts by eating the leaf they were born onto. They do not stay in this stage for long. As it gets bigger, the caterpillar sheds its skin four or more times.



What happens during the third stage?

During the third stage, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis (or pupa) which is usually brown or green so it is camouflaged. Many hibernate during the winter at this stage. This is the transformation stage, when the caterpillar tissues are broken down and the adult's insect structures are formed, including growing wings. From the outside, it can look like it is just resting, but inside the pupa, it is changing rapidly as the metamorphosis happens.



What happens during the fourth stage?

The caterpillar transforms into a colourful adult butterfly. When it first emerges, its wings are soft and folded against its body because it had to fit inside the pupa. The butterfly rests and then blood pumps into its wings and they start working and flapping. The butterfly usually learns to fly in 3 or 4 hours. This is the reproductive and active stage. This is usually when the adult butterfly migrates or moves to a new habitat. The adults also mate and the female butterflies lay eggs, beginning the life cycle again.