

# School-to-Nature

## Monarch Butterfly Life Cycle

**EGG:** The adult female Monarch lays 300-1000 eggs over her 2-5 weeks as an adult flyer, often just one per milkweed leaf. The eggs take 3-5 days to hatch.

(Note: the male Monarch butterfly does not live as long; he declines some days after mating—his job is done.)



**LARVA:** After hatching, the larva eats its egg, then feeds on the milkweed leaf. Milkweed contains a substance (cardenolide) that tastes so bad that predators will not go near Monarchs, at any age or stage. This is one reason milkweed plants are so important to Monarchs.



**CATERPILLAR:** Larva grow from under an inch to about 3 inches long, a handsome black/white/yellow caterpillar. Larva shed their skins 5 times while growing, taking 10-14 days before reaching full size, eating many milkweed leaves per day.



**PUPA:** The caterpillar creates its chrysalis by attaching itself with a silky pad to the underside of a milkweed leaf. It hangs upside down for 10-14 days, shedding its yellow and black skin to reveal the camouflaging leaf-green capsule. Just before hatching, this capsule becomes transparent.



**BUTTERFLY:** (scientific name IMAGO) The chrysalis splits, the butterfly emerges, and rests until its wings are dry before flying. It takes 4-5 days to mature, then lives as an adult for 2-5 weeks. Autumn-born Monarchs live long enough to migrate all the way south and to begin the trip back north.



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