

What Does a Monarch Caterpillar Eat?

Scientific Background

Over the course of its development, a Monarch caterpillar eats about 9,000 times its own weight. During its larval stage, the Monarch caterpillar increases its weight about 2,800 times. Monarch caterpillars eat only milkweed leaves, which contain a bitter substance that the caterpillar's body stores. This substance becomes a toxin that acts as a deterrent to keep its predators, such as hungry birds and mice, from eating the caterpillars.

Vocabulary

- caterpillar
- latex
- milkweed
- prolegs
- deterrent
- mandibles
- predator
- toxin

*Vocabulary definitions can be found in the **Backyard Bugs** Glossary.*

Thinking Question

Why is it important that Monarch caterpillars eat only milkweed leaves?

Exploratory and Extension Activities

Additional Exploratory and Extension activities are available in the Backyard Bugs Teacher's Guide.

Caterpillar Math

For 2nd grade: Create worksheets with rows and columns of caterpillars (4 rows with 4 boxes in each row for 16 caterpillars, or 2 rows with 6 boxes in each row for 12 caterpillars). Have students circle caterpillar groups to represent these fractional parts: $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and so on (for 16 caterpillars); $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{6}$, and so on (for 12 caterpillars).





Caterpillars in Japanese Culture

Read *The Girl who Loved Caterpillars: A Twelfth-Century Tale from Japan* by Jean Merrill (ISBN: 0399218718). Discuss the story, including on details about caterpillars as well as about Japan and Japanese culture.

Name: _____

What does a Monarch Caterpillar Eat?







What does a Monarch caterpillar eat? Check Yes or No for each type of food.				
	Cheese 	Cactus Leaves 	Milkweed Leaves 	Grapes 
Yes				
No				

Answer Key

What does a Monarch Caterpillar Eat?



What does a Monarch caterpillar eat? Check Yes or No for each type of food.				
	Cheese 	Cactus Leaves 	Milkweed Leaves 	Grapes 
Yes			✓	
No	✓	✓		✓