

Butterflies in the classroom

Growing out caterpillars in the classroom is one of the key life cycle activities in Virginia schools. Once the caterpillars have gone through their life cycle and become butterflies what happens to the adults? In most classrooms, the butterflies are taken outside and released. At times, it may not be humane to do an outside release - too cold, heavy rains or no natural foods are available when the butterflies are ready to go. Also, some butterflies don't fully develop their wings and are unable to fly.

There is so much more that can be done if the butterflies are released in the classroom that will add to the investigation of life cycles, food webs, and animal behavior. Be sure to check with your administration about keeping the butterflies in the classroom.

You will need to feed the butterflies; most species will feed on sugar water as well as slices of fresh fruit. You can find recipes for feeding butterflies kept indoors on the internet for several different species. Below are several investigations to try with your students. Your students will ask questions that may lead to other investigations. Scientific investigations always lead to additional questions. The students will be able to create a wide variety of graphs based on the data they collect.

- Place small Styrofoam trays around the room, on each tray put a thin layer of soil, a brightly colored artificial flower; in bottle caps placed near the flower put a small amount of sugar water.
 - Do the butterflies prefer one colored flower over another?
 - Does the flower shape or type make a difference?
 - If you put one tray in the sun and an identical tray in the shade will one be used more than the other?
 - If you add fresh orange slices or other sliced fruit do they prefer that over the sugar water?
- Have the students wear brightly colored T-shirts one day. Do the butterflies land on one color more than others? Do this investigation after the butterflies have been flying around for a few days so they are not spooked by the students. Remind students that butterflies do not bite and will not hurt them if they land on them.
- Bring in fresh flowers, either those purchased from a florist or those grown in the schoolyard. Place the flowers in vases of water around the room.
 - Do the butterflies prefer fresh cut or those from florist?
 - Does species or color of flowers make a difference?

Be prepared for the butterflies to escape your classroom and fly throughout the school and for some to complete their life cycle and die.

Butterflies, like all animals, excrete waste, students will want to wipe down their desks each day as well as wash their hands afterward.



Tiger Swallowtail - Virginia State Insect