

Raising Monarch Caterpillars from Eggs

The trick about rearing from eggs is that you need to manage the moisture. Too moist and the leaf that the egg is on will mold. Too dry and the leaf will desiccate and the egg can dry out.

The entire egg hatching period is only about 3-4 days depending on temperature. Unless you saw the female lay the eggs, you do not know exactly how old it is. So, you may be waiting a few hours for the egg to hatch or a few days.

Here's what to do:

- 1) Pinch off the leaf from the milkweed plant



- 2) Take scissors and cut the leaf leaving the egg on about a postage stamp size piece of leaf

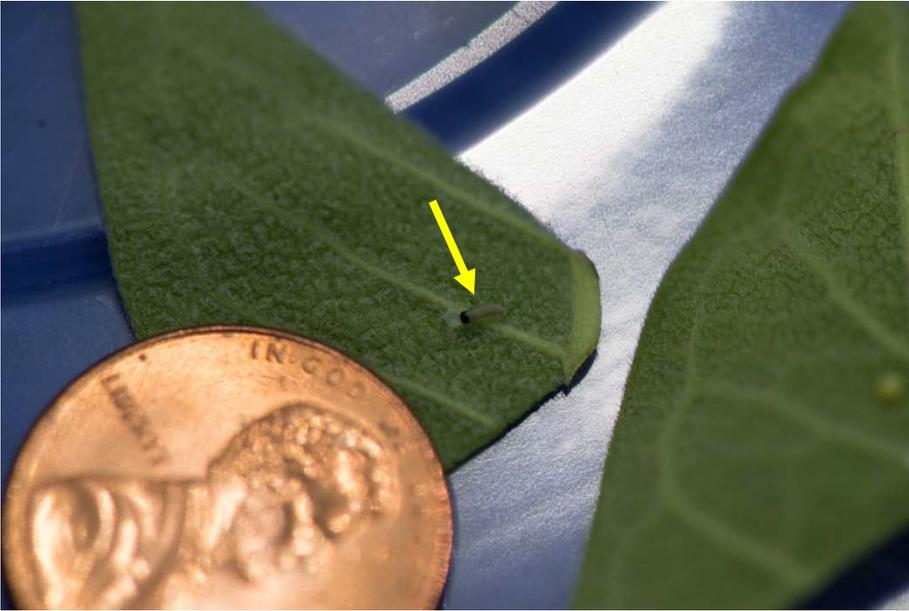


- 3) Get a large plastic container -- A "Family" size is good. Poke holes in the lid for air transfer. A corn cob holder is an easy tool to use to poke holes in the lid.
- 4) In the bottom of the container fold a piece of paper towel and put it in the bottom.
- 5) Take a mister (make sure no chemicals were used in your mister) and just barely dampen the paper towel. If you are on city/town water then you probably have chlorine in your water. Use bottled water in your mister or set the water out in a pitcher for 24 hours so the chlorine gases out.
- 6) Take a smaller plastic lid and put it on top of the paper towel inside the larger one.
- 7) Put the eggs on top of this smaller lid.



- 8) Put the lid with air holes on the big container (this will help keep in moisture from your misting) and close it up.
- 9) Once a day open the lid and air out the container. Look at the piece of leaf -- is your egg still there? If yes....continue to wait and replace the paper towel even though it doesn't seem to need replacing. Mold could be growing in it. Simply replace the paper towel and mist very lightly.

10) If you do not see the egg....look for the tiny caterpillar - make sure you don't squish it. It is most likely on the leaf that it's egg was on but it may have wandered away. Be very careful. They are very very small.



If the egg is gone, it means the caterpillar emerged and ate the egg. They do this for nutrition. Sometimes they only eat part of the egg so you may see some remains.

12) Next phase - raising the teeny tiny caterpillars to something you can see:

If the caterpillar is still on its leaf, put a fresh piece of milkweed in the container and put the tiny square of leaf with the caterpillar on top of it. The little caterpillar will wander over to the fresh food when it's ready.

If the caterpillar wandered away and is on the side of the container or the lid, gently lift it using a very very soft watercolor (or similar) paint brush and put it onto a fresh piece of milkweed. Use a paint brush with natural fibers as they are softer than plastic. You can also try to coax it onto the edge of the fresh piece of milkweed but be careful not to squish the little fellow.

If the egg is gone and you don't see the caterpillar, your eyes may not be good enough to see it. Just put a piece of milkweed in there and it should crawl to it when it's ready.

Don't throw away any bits of leaf until all your caterpillars are accounted for. Just place them in a corner of the container or near the fresh piece of milkweed.

Before switching out your paper towel, check it thoroughly and carefully for caterpillars. They may go into a fold or on an underside. Do a head count before you throw anything away.

Note: The newly hatched caterpillars will eat their siblings that are in eggs so you should remove the newly hatched caterpillars to a different container than the container that you are hatching eggs in.

Make sure there is a little bit of room between leaves so after they eat their egg they don't crawl over and eat their siblings. They can also be under the leaf that their egg was on so you have to be very careful when turning it over. Removing newly hatched caterpillars to another container allows the other ones to hatch without worrying about frass in the area.

Once the eggs have all hatched, get rid of the smaller lid inside the container and just use the paper towel on the bottom.



13) Over the next few days, continue to rear the caterpillars in the tupperware container. They are too small to try to rear in the big rearing cage (easily lost).

Do not mist the paper towel once you've started putting full size leaves in the container. The full size leaves have enough moisture.

14) Each day (for about 3 days), do a head count, switch out the paper towel, and provide fresh food.

The frass (poop) will be small but you can take a paint brush and dust it off the leaf. It's important to remove frass so disease and bacteria do not build up.

The caterpillars will often be on the underside of the leaf so carefully flip it over to see them and make sure everyone is there. You will also see the tiny chew holes where they have been eating.

To provide fresh food, you can carefully move them to the new leaf using the paint brush (I only do this if I really need to), or cut out the piece of leaf that they are sitting on and place it on the new leaf, or if the old leaf is still kind of ok, you can put the new leaf in and hope they move over to it.

15) When the caterpillars are about 1/2"-3/4" long, move them to your regular rearing cage.