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How to Feed Butterflies

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Butterflies are unique, delicate insects that come in many different beautiful colors and patterns. If you have some butterflies that you need to regularly feed or you just want to provide a snack for the butterflies that pass through your yard, there are ways that you can do so. What kind of food you feed butterflies and how you should feed them depends on whether they're injured, in nature, or in a habitat.

Method

1 Feeding Butterflies in Nature

1 Provide flower nectar for butterflies in nature. Naturally, butterflies survive by consuming the nectar provided by different types of flowers. The best kind of food you can give them is this nectar. Milkweed, zinnias, and marigolds are popular with butterflies -- try planting these in your yard to attract and feed butterflies.^[1]

2 Use canned fruit nectar as an alternative to flower nectar. If you don't want to grow and take care of flowers, purchase some canned fruit nectar instead. To successfully serve canned fruit nectar, pour some into a plastic bottle cap or saturate a tissue in it and set it out in a butterfly feeder, on a porch railing, or somewhere similar.^[2]

3 Give butterflies sugar water if you don't have any nectar. This acts as makeshift nectar. Mix 1 part white cane table sugar with 4 parts warm water until the sugar dissolves completely. This should provide nutrition and energy for your butterflies so that they can thrive.^[3]

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- White cane table sugar provides the best nutrients for butterflies and also dissolves easily, compared to other forms of sugar.^[4]

4 Feed butterflies rotting fruit as an alternative. Slice up some fruit that's going bad to give to your butterflies. They especially like to eat rotting grapefruits, oranges, strawberries, peaches, nectarines, apples, and bananas. Add a little bit of water or fruit juice to your sliced fruit to keep it desirably moist.^[5]

5 Make a butterfly feeder. The best way to feed butterflies in nature is to buy or create some sort of butterfly feeder. You can do this in several different ways, whether you want to hang a plastic water bottle full of food from a tree, or set a shallow plate with a base among your garden. Get crafty and make a desirable feeder to draw in as many butterflies as possible.

Method

2

Feeding Butterflies in a Habitat

1 Use Gatorade or fruit juice as an easy solution. The easiest way to feed butterflies in a habitat is with Gatorade or another already-prepared juice drink. As is, Gatorade and fruit juice have the sugar and water needed in order to provide nutrients to your butterflies. Use these for food if you want to be able to feed your butterflies quickly and easily.^[6]

2 Make your own creative butterfly food solution to get the best results. If you're willing to put a little more time and effort into your butterfly food to ensure maximum nutrition, make your own food solution. Mix 3 ounces (88.7 ml) of water or Gatorade with 1 teaspoon (4.9 ml) of simple syrup. Then, add in 6 drops of soy sauce.

- To make your own simple syrup, add 1 cup (240 ml) of sugar to 1 cup (240 ml) of water. Almost bring the mixture to a boil, but remove it from heat just before it starts to boil.

3 Serve liquid food in a small, shallow container for easy access. To make the food appealing to your butterflies, you'll need to serve it in a proper container. The smaller and shallower the container is, the

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better. Opt for a saucer or bottle lid if possible. Simply fill the dish or container, lower it into the habitat, and close the habitat.^[7]

- You can also use a small cup or a candle votive, but since these options are deeper, make sure to fill the container with marbles for the butterflies to stand on while they eat.

4 Provide skewered fresh fruit when you have several butterfly species. Fruit serves as an adequate food source for all different types of butterflies, so this might be the best option if you have a variety of species in your habitat. Take a skewer or a piece of bamboo and slide chunks of fruit onto it. Then, set it in the habitat.^[8]

- If the fruit won't stay on the skewer, secure a bread twist tie underneath the bottom piece of fruit.

5 Place fruit in the brightest area of the habitat. Butterflies instinctually gravitate towards bright areas, so they'll have an easier time finding the fruit if it's located in a brighter part of their habitat.^[9] Place fruit skewers horizontally on the butterflies' habitat floor or set them up vertically in a corner in the brightest part of the habitat. They should be able to find and consume the food themselves.^[10]

Method

3 Helping Injured Butterflies Eat

1 Opt for liquids like warm children's juices, colas, and fruit punches. Children's juices, colas, and fruit punches make for the best first aid treatment for hurt, sick, or young butterflies. Use these as food if possible, and make sure to provide them at room temperature or warmer.

2 Soak a paper towel with the liquid food and place it in a dish. Decide which kind of food that you'd like to go with and then soak up the liquid with a paper towel. This will allow the butterflies to eat the food without getting their feet extremely wet.^[11]

3 Pick up each butterfly and set it onto the soaked paper towel. First, make sure your hands are completely dry. When one of your

butterflies closes its wings, pinch them together extremely carefully at [our cookie policy](#).

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the tips. Lift the butterfly up and place it onto the paper towel so that it can taste the food on it. Continue doing this with all of your butterflies.

- If you aren't gentle, you can very easily seriously injure the butterflies by picking them up. It's very important to be careful when handling them.
- It's necessary to do it this way because butterflies taste with their feet.

4 Lower the butterfly's proboscis with a toothpick if it doesn't do so itself. Once they're placed on the paper towel, the butterflies will likely recognize that food is available and automatically lower their proboscises to consume it. If one of the butterflies doesn't do this, very carefully take a toothpick or a paperclip and lower the butterfly's proboscis towards the food yourself.^[12]

- The butterfly may be resistant at first and try to push the toothpick or paperclip away. Be persistent for a couple of minutes. If the butterfly is still resisting at this point, stop and try again in 1-2 hours.

5 Offer the butterflies food at least once each day. Pick up each butterfly carefully by the tips of its wings and place it onto the food-soaked paper towel at least once a day. If you struggle to get a butterfly to eat, give it a few more chances throughout the day. Even your butterflies who eat willingly may eat at these other opportunities too, as butterflies tend to prefer spaced out feeding times.^[13]

Community Q&A

Question

How can I tell when a butterfly is hungry and wants to eat?

Bestie101
Community Answer

They will wiggle their right antenna up and down, and then the left one will either vibrate or do the same. Then they will rub one of their legs on the surface they're on.

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Question

Can I do this with moths as well?

NectarBoy
Community Answer

It depends on the species. Adult moths usually eat nectar, like butterflies, so similar methods may work. However, many do not eat once they reach adulthood, so do research on your type of moth before attempting to feed it.

Question

How do I feed Painted Lady butterflies?

Community Answer

Butterflies feed on nectar, and you can make a sugar water solution for them to drink, just as you would with a hummingbird. They will also lick water off glass. I suggest using a small water dish with sugar water, attach it to something for them to climb on, and put a strainer over it (attach securely) so they can stick their proboscis through the holes to get the fluid without falling in and drowning.

Question

My butterfly isn't showing any signs of hunger and won't eat; it seems weak.

Community Answer

I'm not sure what you currently feed your butterfly, but you could try offering it different foods. Butterflies usually like oranges, grapefruit, bananas, apples and cantaloupe!

Question

I found a monarch washed up on the beach. He is caked in sand. Is it safe to rinse him with a spray bottle of water?

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Community Answer

Yes, as long as you don't damage the wings. Make sure he is alive first.

Tips

Submit a Tip

All tip submissions are carefully reviewed before being published

Warnings

- Butterflies have extremely delicate bodies, and you may severely injure or kill them accidentally if you mishandle them. To avoid this, make sure you know exactly how to touch them and interact with them safely before attempting to.

Things You'll Need

Helping Injured Butterflies Eat

Children's juices, colas, or fruit punches

Paper towels

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Dish

- Toothpick or paperclip (optional)

Feeding Butterflies in Nature

- Flowers
- Canned fruit nectar
- Bottle cap or tissue
- White cane table sugar
- Warm water
- Butterfly feeder

Feeding Butterflies in a Habitat

- Gatorade or fruit juice
- Simple syrup
- Soy sauce
- Small, shallow container
- Marbles (optional)
- Skewer or bamboo
- Fresh fruit chunks
- Bread twist tie (optional)

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