



Caterpillar Hunt

Go on a caterpillar hunt! Caterpillars can often be found on plants they like to eat. Look carefully on the leaves, stems, flowers, or twigs for caterpillars. It takes a bit of effort to locate them, but it is worth it.

Use one of the techniques below to find caterpillars. Once you have found them, watch them carefully and write down what you see. Make sure you write down things like how you found them, where you found them, how many you found, their colors and patterns, what they were doing, etc. And make sure to follow the...

Insect Spotter's Code of Conduct

- * Always leave the environment exactly as you found it. Put back logs and stones if you have been looking under them.
- * If you are taking insects away, always make a note of what they are feeding on. Be sure you have enough of that food for your insect.
- * Always return the insects to the place where you found them.

Look at the foliage or leaves on a tree, shrub, or plant - Caterpillars may feed where we can see them or they may make shelters in which to hide or feed. By day, many retreat from the foliage and seek out cracks and other hiding places on twigs or branches.

Look on the ground - Some caterpillars crawl to the ground for the day, and then return to the plant leaves to feed at night. Look in or under decomposing leaf litter, or in fruit, flowers, wood, lichens, mosses, fungi, and ferns.

"Beating" - This technique loosens a caterpillars' grip from its resting or feeding site. Spread a sheet underneath a tree and use a stout stick to rap against the tree branches to dislodge caterpillars. Collect them on the bed sheet below.

Sweep nets - You can use a net to dislodge caterpillars and catch them. This works best in fields and other habitats where the vegetation is low.

Hints to help you locate caterpillars:

Look carefully and take your time because many caterpillars are trying not to be found.

The best places to look are in gardens, on young foliage, saplings, isolated plants, and plants growing along a forest edge. Be sure to check the underside of leaves.

Species with physical or chemical defenses tend to be easy to see, as their bright colors are a warning to animals that would eat them.

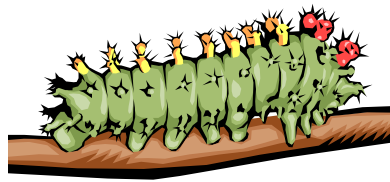
Be careful with "spiny" caterpillars - don't pick them up with your bare hands. Some species that live in Colorado have stinging hairs for defense.

Some caterpillars tend to be "messy eaters" and leave a telltale path of damaged leaves that may make them easier to find.

Many species feed at night, so nighttime walks with a flashlight can be very productive and rewarding for locating caterpillars.

Compare your observations with your classmates. Use a moth or caterpillar field guide to try to identify the caterpillars you found.

Entomologists are scientists who study insects like moths. Some entomologists study how insects can be helpful to people. Some study how insect pests make it hard to grow food, or can cause disease. Others study insects to learn about the environment today and millions of years ago. Entomologists can even help police solve crimes! There are more insects on Earth than any other kind of animal - so there are plenty for you to study.



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