

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies



Learn more about some of the typical butterflies we see in our yards here in central Virginia.

All of the pictures and descriptions are from the University of South Florida unless marked otherwise.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## American Lady - *Vanessa virginiensis*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1¾ - 2¾ inches (4.45 - 6.6 cm). Upperside has uneven brown, yellow, and orange pattern. Forewing has a black patch, a small white spot in the orange field below the patch, and a white bar at the leading edge. Underside of hindwing has two large eyespots. Winter form is smaller and paler; summer form larger with bright coloring.

**ID Tip:** Two large eyespots on under surface of hindwing.

**Egg:** Small pale green, barrel-shaped eggs are laid singly on host plant leaves.

**Caterpillar:** Variable in color: Greenish yellow with narrow black rings; black with creamy rings. Dark, branched spines are red at the base. There is a pair of white spots on each segment.

Caterpillars are solitary feeders and construct nests from various parts of their host plant. Tiny larvae use leaf hairs to construct tiny nests; larger caterpillars arrange leaves, flower heads, and detritus to form tight shelters. Several structures are typically built during the caterpillar's development.

**Chrysalis:** Color varies: gray or various degrees of gold and brown. A wide dark line extends from head to tail. There are rows of triangular projections tipped with black dots as well as black dots on other parts of the chrysalis. Often formed within a leaf-enclosed nest.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Cabbage White - *Pieris rapae*



Male



Female



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1¼ - 1¾ inches (3.2 - 4.8 cm) UPPER SURFACE (dorsal)  
Predominantly white with charcoal forewing tips. One (male) or two (female) charcoal black forewing spots. Seasonally dimorphic. Spring and late fall individuals are typically smaller, less yellow, and black markings are reduced.

**ID Tip:** One spot (male) or two black spots (female) on upper surface (dorsal) forewing. Ventral surfaces may be creamy or white.

**Egg:** Initially white, turning yellow orange; spindle shaped.

**Caterpillar:** Green; yellow line runs length of body; covered with fine white hairs that create a velvety look.

**Chrysalis:** Green or speckled tan, depending on season and structure to which it attaches. Point on head; pointed projections along sides. The overwintering stage.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Common Buckeye - *Junonia coenia*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1½ - 2¾ inches (4.2 - 7 cm). Upperside is brown. Forewing has 2 orange cell bars and 2 eyespots. Hindwing has 2 eyespots; the upper one is larger and contains a magenta crescent. The underside of the hindwing is brown or tan in the wet season (summer) and rose-red in the dry season (fall). Females tend to be larger.

**ID Tip:** Upperside displays striking, multicolored eyespots on forewings and hindwings.

**Egg:** Ribbed, small stubby green eggs are laid singly on host plant foliage. Often placed on the upper surface of the leaf.

**Caterpillar:** Black with lateral white stripes, orange patches and branched spines.

**Chrysalis:** Mottled pale brown or dark gray brown. Rows of short conical projections on abdomen.



# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Eastern Tailed Blue - *Cupido comyntas*



Upper side Male



Upper side Female



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan:  $\frac{3}{4}$  -  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches (2.2 - 2.9 cm) UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) Male iridescent blue. Summer female uniformly brown; spring female smaller with much blue at wing bases. UNDER SURFACE (ventral) Hindwing pale gray with black bar; distinct black spots

and three large orange spots at outer margin near the tail. One hindwing tail.

**ID Tip:** The only blue with tails. Orange chevrons are located near tails on both upper side and underside wing surfaces.

**Egg:** Pale green; flattened disc. Laid singly, often on or near buds of host.

**Caterpillar:** Color varies: green; green and red; mostly red. Dorsal stripe and lateral lines. Body covered with fine white hairs. Head black. The overwintering stage.

**Chrysalis:** Color varies: whitish green with darker head and thorax; dark green; tan. Bean shaped.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Eastern Tiger Swallowtail – *Papilio glaucus*



Male



Female

iNaturalist



Caterpillar

iNaturalist



Female – Dark phase

iNaturalist



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 2 - 4½ inches (7.9 - 14 cm). UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) Male yellow with prominent black stripes and black wing edges. Female either yellow or blackish with similar markings. Male hindwing has little or no blue scaling; female hindwing has extensive blue scaling.

UNDER SURFACE (ventral) Striped, as on upper surface. Forewing outer band divided into uniform yellow spots. Hindwing with bands of orange spots and blue clouding. Body striped.

ID Tip: Background color may be yellow or black, but black stripes are visible, especially on under surface.

**Egg:** Green spheres; deposited singly, usually on the upper surface of a host plant leaf.

**Caterpillar:** Green. Thorax enlarged; has tiny blue dots and two small spots that appear to be eyes. Transverse yellow and black stripe below thorax sometimes visible. Head pinkish brown. Osmeterium orange. Immediately before pupation, color changes from green to brown. Young caterpillars brownish black with white “saddle” mark; resemble droppings.

**Chrysalis:** Mottled brown. Two short projections on head; one knobby projection at top of thorax. The overwintering stage.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Great Spangled Fritillary - *Speyeria Cybele*



Male – Upper side



Female – Upper side



Male – Underside



Female – Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 2½ - 4 inches (6.3 - 10.1 cm)  
UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) Male orange; dappled with spots and lines. Female darker on basal wing portion. UNDER SURFACE (ventral) Hindwing pale brown (male) or dark orange (female); wide pale band; large silver spots or "spangles."

ID Tip: Ventrally, large metallic silver spots and a wide pale submarginal band.

**Egg:** Creamy white turning golden tan; flattened cone shape. Usually scattered near violets.

**Caterpillar:** Velvety black; rows of black spines emerging from red/orange bases. Head black with two short horns. Reddish, bulb shaped osmeterium under head. The overwintering stage (first instar).

**Chrysalis:** Chestnut brown; chunky.



# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Monarch - *Danaus plexippus*



Male



Female



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 3½ - 5 inches (8.6 - 12.4 cm) UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) Male bright orange with swollen, oval scent patches on hindwing veins. Female brownish orange. Both with black veins; wide borders flecked with white dots. UNDER SURFACE (ventral) Similar to upper surface but hindwing pale orange. Head and body spotted.

ID Tip: Orange with black veins and wide black borders flecked with white dots.

**Egg:** White; round. Laid singly on host leaves.

**Caterpillar:** White with black and yellow rings; two long, black filaments at head and tail ends. Head whitish with black stripes.

**Chrysalis:** Green; fine black lines; gold-dotted dorsal band around abdomen.



# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Mourning Cloak - *Nymphalis antiopa*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 2¼ - 4 inches (5.7 - 10.1 cm). Upperside is purple-black with a wide, bright yellow border on outer margins and a row of iridescent blue spots at the inner edge of the border. Short projections/tails on both wings. Borders are irregular. Adults overwinter.

ID Tip: Open wings are dark with bright yellow borders and blue interior spots.

**Egg:** Tiny, pale green eggs are laid in groups of 30-50 that encircle a twig of the host plant.

**Caterpillar:** Caterpillars are gregarious and live together in a communal web. When alarmed, young caterpillars thrash and twitch in synchrony or drop en masse to the ground. Fully grown larvae are black with several rows of black bristles that cover the body. A distinctive row of red spots extends down the middle of the back.

**Chrysalis:** Tan or gray brown. Hangs upside down with two horn-like head projections, a "beak," and several thorny tubercles on the body.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Orange Sulphur - *Colias comyntas*



Male (L) and Female (R)  
Upper side



Female in Gray Stage



Underside of both



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1½ - 2½ inches (4.1 - 6 cm). UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) Yellow. Black spot on center forewing. Hindwing has central orange spot. Males have solid black borders; females have wider borders peppered with yellow spots.

UNDER SURFACE (ventral) Yellow or golden yellow with double, red-rimmed silver spot in center. Some females are white (alba). In the field, these females are impossible to distinguish from white form Clouded Sulphur females.

ID Tip: Displays at least some gold/orange on upper surface.

**Egg:** Spindle-shaped. White when laid; turns orange/red.

**Caterpillar:** Grass green with a multicolored stripe along lower edge. Upper stripe is white; followed by red/pink; white; black. Orange Sulphur caterpillars are so similar that they cannot be reliably separated in the field.

**Chrysalis:** Green with yellow and black dashes. The overwintering stage.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Red Admiral - *Vanessa Atalanta*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1¾ - 3 inches (4.5 - 7.6 cm). The upper side is black with white spots near wing tip; the forewing has a red median band; the hindwing has a red marginal band. The winter form is smaller and duller; the summer form is larger and brighter with an interrupted forewing band.

**ID Tip:** Dorsal wings have a red-orange forewing band and white forewing spots.

**Egg:** Greenish, barrel-shaped eggs are laid on host plant leaves.

**Caterpillar:** Variable in color, ranging from yellow all the way to black. Black individuals are covered with minute yellow flecks. Six groups of branched spines cross each segment. Young caterpillars may live together within a folded leaf nest. Older caterpillars are solitary and form their own enclosures.

**Chrysalis:** May be gray or brown with black markings. Short tubercles cover the body and a speckled with gold flecks.



# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Red Spotted Purple - *Limenitis arthemis Astyanax*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 2¼ - 4 inches (5.7 - 10.1 cm). The upperside is blue to blue-green with much iridescence on the outer part of the hindwing. The underside is dark brown. The forewing has 2 red-orange bars near the base of the leading edge; the hindwing has 3 red-orange spots near the base and a row of red-orange spots.

**ID Tip:** Large black butterfly with bright iridescent blue and orange spots. No tails.

**Egg:** Gray-green. Laid singly on the tip of host plant leaf.

**Caterpillar:** Resembles bird droppings in all stages. May be mottled brown or green with creamy blotches and two knobby horns on thorax.

Partially grown caterpillars from the third brood spend the winter in a specially rolled leaf called a hibernaculum that they silk to a branch. Feeding and development resumes that following spring. Note: To distinguish Red-spotted Purple caterpillars from Viceroy caterpillars, look for rounded rather than spiked projections behind the head.

**Chrysalis:** Shiny brown and white. Also resembles a bird dropping. Thorax has a large, keel-like projection.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

## Silver Spotted Skipper - *Epargyreus clarus*



Upper side



Underside



Caterpillar



Chrysalis

**Butterfly:** Wingspan: 1¾ - 2¼ inches (4.4 - 6.0 cm). UPPER SURFACE (dorsal) has a dark brown ground color. A distinctive band of golden orange nearly crosses the central portion of the wing. A light checkered fringe occurs on hind and forewings. UNDER SURFACE (ventral): Forewing has a similar golden-orange band. Hindwing has a large silver-white patch. Both have frosted lavender margins. There are two short, stubby tails. Forewings are pointed.

**Egg:** A single, pale egg is deposited on or near host plant. Many field guides describe Silver-spotted Skipper eggs as green, but they often appear to be white. Reddish and even red-ringed eggs have also been observed. (*See photos below.*)

**Caterpillar:** Yellow-green body with dark, transverse stripes. Red-brown head that bears a pair of orange eyespots low on the front. Collar brown. Front three pairs of legs (thorax) are brown. Legs on mid-body (prolegs) are orange. Final instar turns brownish orange prior to pupation

**Chrysalis:** Brown with variable light and dark markings. The overwintering stage.

# Your Neighborhood Butterflies

To learn more:

Publication Links for Caterpillars to Butterflies Demonstration

Your Neighborhood Butterflies

<https://hanovermastergardeners.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Your-Neighborhood-Butterflies.pdf>

Creating Inviting Habitats

Virginia Cooperative Extension (Publication HORT-59-PDF)-

[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/HORT/HORT-59/HORT-59-PDF.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/HORT/HORT-59/HORT-59-PDF.pdf)

Monarch Outdoor Lifecycle Kit Instructional Guide

MonarchResearch.org

<https://monarchresearch.org/>

Nectar and Host Plants for Selected Mid-Atlantic Butterflies and Months

Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia

<https://mgnv.org/wildlife/nectar-and-host-plants-for-lepidopterans/>

Hanover Master Gardeners, 13015 Taylor Complex Lane, Ashland, VA 23005, 804-752-4310

[www.hanovermastergardeners.org](http://www.hanovermastergardeners.org)

Ask your gardening questions at - [hanover.master.gardener@gmail.com](mailto:hanover.master.gardener@gmail.com)

Additional information available at:

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)