

# BUTTERFLY NURSERY

You will need:

- A box
- Transparent plastic film (plastic wrap)
- A food source for your caterpillar  
(Rule of thumb, you will find the caterpillar on the food source it is most happy with- i.e. Snapdragon, milkweed, nettle)
- Caterpillars

## **Step One**

Spend some time out on the caterpillar prowl to gather five or six caterpillars to place in your butterfly box. Then gather the food source by digging up the plant you found your little buddies on. Try to unearth a root about the size of a tennis ball. Your caterpillars will thank you for it. Pot your plant and tend it as well as you can - if it dies or they eat it all, replace it - to give your new pets the best diet possible.

## **Step Two**

Cut the center out of the lid and the bottom of a shoebox, and make windows with transparent plastic film, available from craft shops. Put in as many (small) air holes as the structural integrity of the shoebox can withstand. Place the potted nettle inside the box and secure the lid with an elastic band or two. Put the box somewhere light. Now you can watch your very own hungry caterpillars systematically stuffing themselves for a few weeks, possibly doubling their weight every two days, and also generating a surprising amount of poo - or "frass" - which may need to be cleaned out.

Then, one day, after they've reached a desired weight, they'll hang themselves upside down from the lid of the box for a few days, and go into the long sleep of the chrysalis. This is a sleeping bag made out of spit and their own, molted skin. As the chrysalis matures it will become more and more transparent and you will soon be able to see the outline of things like legs and antenna. Document the changes you see in your Jr. Naturalist Journal.

## **Step three**

After another two to three weeks, in the early morning between 6-9am, the adult butterflies will emerge. They flex their dry wings and may shed a liquid called meconium, which looks like blood, but is harmless waste. After a couple of days of wing-flexing, they can be re-released into the wild. Record your events in your Jr. to be substituted for the full Volunteer requirements of the 2007 Jr. Naturalist Program...