

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## What Does a Caterpillar Eat?

Caterpillars may be small, but they are always hungry! These little creatures are herbivores, which means they eat only plants. Caterpillars play an important role in nature as they munch their way through leaves, stems, and flowers. Let's dive into their world of eating!

Most caterpillars start their lives by eating the very leaf they were born on. Their mother, a butterfly or moth, carefully chooses the perfect plant for them. This plant, called a host plant, provides all the food the caterpillar needs to grow. Different caterpillar species prefer different host plants. For example, monarch caterpillars eat milkweed, while swallowtail caterpillars enjoy parsley and dill.

Caterpillars don't just nibble on leaves—they devour them! These insects have strong jaws, called mandibles, that allow them to bite and chew their food. They eat throughout the day, growing bigger and bigger. A caterpillar's main job during this stage of its life is to eat enough food to store energy for its transformation into a butterfly or moth.

Sometimes caterpillars eat parts of the plant other than leaves. Some may enjoy flowers, seeds, or even fruits. However, they never eat meat or other animals, so you won't find a caterpillar hunting! They rely on plants for all their nutrients.

Caterpillars are very good at finding food. They use their sense of smell to locate the perfect leaves. Once they find a good spot, they stay there, eating as much as they can before moving on to another leaf.

The next time you see a caterpillar, look closely at what it's eating. You'll probably see it happily chewing on a leaf, helping plants grow new leaves by clearing away the old ones. Caterpillars may be tiny, but they have a huge appetite and a big role to play in the natural world!