

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## What's on the Menu for Moths?

Moths are fascinating insects with an equally interesting diet. Most moths are herbivores, which means they eat plants, but their food preferences can vary depending on the species and life stage. Some moths eat nectar from flowers, while others feed on leaves, fruit, or even tree sap.

Adult moths are best known for sipping nectar from flowers, much like their butterfly relatives. They use a special mouthpart called a proboscis, which works like a long straw. This allows them to reach deep inside flowers to drink the sweet nectar. Nectar gives moths the energy they need to fly and find mates. Some species, like the hawk moth, are important pollinators because they carry pollen from one flower to another as they feed.

Moth caterpillars, which are the larva stage of the insect, have a completely different diet. Caterpillars are plant eaters and feed on leaves, stems, or even fruits. Some moth caterpillars are very picky about what they eat, sticking to one specific plant. For example, the luna moth caterpillar prefers hickory and walnut leaves. On the other hand, some caterpillars, like the gypsy moth caterpillar, are not picky at all and eat many different kinds of plants.

There are some moths, however, that don't follow the herbivore rule. A few species are omnivores, meaning they eat both plants and other things. For example, the wax moth can eat beeswax and honey inside beehives. Other moths, like the vampire moth, drink the blood of animals, although this is very rare.

Moths obtain their food in simple ways. Adult moths fly to flowers at night to feed on nectar, often guided by the scent of the flowers. Caterpillars, meanwhile, simply crawl to the nearest leaf and start munching. Their survival depends on how well they can find food and avoid predators.

Moths play an important role in the food chain. As caterpillars and adults, they provide food for many animals like birds and bats. Their plant-based diet and pollination work help keep ecosystems in balance, making them essential contributors to nature's delicate web.