

Butterfly Life Cycle

Eggs (3–5 days)

Adult female butterflies lay their eggs on plants that painted lady caterpillars like to eat, like thistle or hollyhock. The eggs are the size of a pinhead, each one containing a caterpillar beginning to grow.



Caterpillar or Larva (5–10 days)

The hungry caterpillar uses its strong jaws to munch through leaves, eating constantly and growing quickly. As it eats, the caterpillar's skin gets tighter. Soon it sheds this tight skin, emerging with new skin underneath. Each caterpillar changes skin four times before it's fully grown. When this hairy black-and-yellow caterpillar stops growing, it's almost 2 inches long!



Chrysalis or Pupa (7–10 days)

The caterpillar finds a safe place to rest. With a silk thread that comes out of a hole just below its mouth (spinneret), the caterpillar spins a silk pad to attach to. The caterpillar hangs from this pad. Soon, the caterpillar's skin splits open from head to abdomen, revealing a dull, brownish case underneath—the chrysalis. What is happening in the chrysalis? Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar is becoming completely liquid and reforming itself into a butterfly. The butterfly pushes from inside until the case splits open, and it slowly struggles out.



Butterfly (2 weeks)

When the butterfly first emerges from the chrysalis, its wings are soft and crumpled. The tired butterfly rests, and then slowly unfolds its wings to dry. After a few hours, the butterfly will be ready to fly. The painted lady butterfly has a 2-week life span. During that time, its main goal is to reproduce and lay eggs so the cycle can begin again!

