

Caterpillar identification chart

Six regional examples | Eastern United States, with a Mid-Atlantic focus | Online Field Guide

Compare mature larval markings and the feeding plant. Observe without touching: hairs and spines may irritate skin.

1. Monarch caterpillar

Danaus plexippus



Black, white and yellow bands; two pairs of filaments

Mature caterpillar

2. Black swallowtail caterpillar

Papilio polyxenes



Green body; black bands dotted with yellow

Mature caterpillar

3. Tiger swallowtail caterpillar

Papilio glaucus



Green body; large false eyespots behind the head

Mature caterpillar

4. Cecropia caterpillar

Hyalophora cecropia



Large green larva with colorful raised knobs

Mature caterpillar

5. Eastern tent caterpillar

Malacosoma americanum



Hairy dark body; continuous white back stripe

Mature caterpillar

6. Spongy moth caterpillar

Lymantria dispar



Five pairs of blue spots, then six pairs of red

Mature caterpillar

1. Robbie Hannawacker
2. Even Dankowicz; CC BY 4.0.
3. C Mo
4. Ken Kneidel
5. Mirko Schoenitz
6. Nash Turley; CC BY 4.0.

Comparison notes and photo credits

Caterpillar chart companion | Original layout and wording by Online Field Guide

Caterpillar	Habitat clue	Identification level	Larval activity
Monarch caterpillar	Milkweed in gardens and open fields	Mature-larva candidate	Late spring through early fall
Black swallowtail caterpillar	Parsley, dill, fennel and carrot relatives	Mature-larva candidate	Late spring through early fall
Tiger swallowtail caterpillar	Tulip trees, cherries and other tree hosts	Tiger-swallowtail candidate	Late spring through early fall
Cecropia caterpillar	Deciduous trees and shrubs, including maple	Mature-larva candidate	Summer into early fall
Eastern tent caterpillar	Cherry and crabapple trees; branch-fork tents	Species candidate	Spring
Spongy moth caterpillar	Many deciduous trees, especially oaks	Developed-larva candidate	Spring through early summer

The months describe caterpillar activity, not adult flight. Host plants help narrow the choices, but a wandering larva may have left its feeding plant. Exact timing changes with latitude and weather.

Photo credits and original file links

- 1. Monarch caterpillar:** *Danaus plexippus* - iNaturalist photo 1830082, by Robbie Hannawacker.
- 2. Black swallowtail caterpillar:** *Papilio polyxenes* - iNaturalist photo 161288646, by Even Dankowicz. CC BY 4.0.
- 3. Tiger swallowtail caterpillar:** *Papilio glaucus* - iNaturalist photo 52862039, by C Mo.
- 4. Cecropia caterpillar:** *Hyalophora cecropia* - iNaturalist photo 212008711, by Ken Kneidel.
- 5. Eastern tent caterpillar:** *Malacosoma americanum* - iNaturalist photo 7765039, by Mirko Schoenitz.
- 6. Spongy moth caterpillar:** *Lymantria dispar* - iNaturalist photo 134496553, by Nash Turley. CC BY 4.0.

Identification references: Monarch caterpillar; Black swallowtail caterpillar; Tiger swallowtail caterpillar; Cecropia caterpillar; Eastern tent caterpillar; Spongy moth caterpillar.

This chart compares regional examples; it is not a complete species key.