

Rearing Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell Butterflies.

Early Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell are specially reared for school use and are not usually available before early May with Peacock following later. Caterpillars (Larvae) are always sent because eggs are laid in masses, which cannot be split.

Foodplant: Stinging Nettle.

In early spring, a helpful tip is to pot young Stinging Nettle plants in order to provide established, growing food plant on which larvae will thrive, avoiding the necessity to replenish food daily. This is particularly helpful for busy teachers! Note that nettles do not transplant successfully later in the season.

Young larvae may be kept in a size 5 plastic box (an ice cream or margarine container can be used but transparent plastic is much better). Air holes at this stage are not recommended. Line the box with absorbent kitchen paper. Transfer larvae gently on to fresh foodplant, using a fine paintbrush. Better still; put the larvae directly on to potted nettle in a light or sunny place.

Tasks for each day.

Boxed larvae need a change of paper and foodplant; cut off any leaves or stem which larvae cling to, rather than trying to pull them off. Place boxed larvae out of direct sunlight, at room temperature of 60° 70oF. When the larvae need more space and food, move them to a cage on cut nettle in a jar of water. Plug the neck of the jar with cotton wool to avoid drowning tragedies! If you do not have a suitable cage, you may improvise using a fishtank, with netting on the top.

Points to remember.

Do not place larvae on wet foodplant; do not overcrowd; keep larger larvae in an airy, well ventilated cage; ensure nettle is always fresh and plentiful especially when unattended during weekend.

Pupation.

Both species of butterfly usually complete their life cycle from young caterpillar to pupa within six weeks, depending on conditions and temperature (this may vary depending on the size of caterpillar when received).

As they approach pupation, caterpillars will attach themselves to the top and sides of the cage. Care should be taken not to disturb them during this delicate stage. After hardening, pupae can be left in-situ or carefully removed and laid on moist peat or moss in a netted cage. A few sticks will help emerging adults to climb and expand their wings. Stand the cage in a warm place, but not in direct sunlight (65°-75° is ideal). Emergence is usually within 10-14 days.

Care of living butterflies.

Butterflies like to feed on fresh flowers, such as Marigolds, Dandelions, Buddleia etc (see sheet giving information on plants suitable for butterflies).

Daily correct care will usually ensure healthy caterpillars.