

## Help Butterfly and Moth Species Survive Spring Yard Cleanup

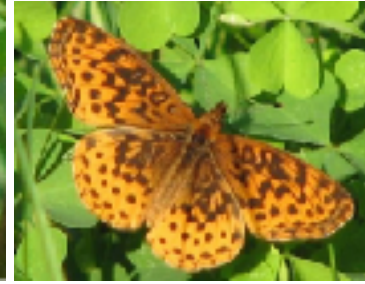
— Colleen Wolpert

Many butterflies and moths need your help to make it through their life cycle and fly this summer. Most species of butterflies and likely all local moths spend their winter with us in New York State. Many are in their sub-adult form – eggs, caterpillars, or pupae. Knowing how they spend their winter and spring will help you to take care not to destroy them. Here are some examples.



The snow-covered grass around the Ash tree was the winter home to a very young Common Wood Nymph caterpillar. Its butterfly stage flew (middle photo), because the grass (its host plant) was left uncut. At the base of the asters in the foreground are half-grown Pearl Crescent caterpillars (butterfly pictured on the right). At the base of the Malva, mature Common Checkered Skipper caterpillars overwinter. Its butterfly stage shows off its blue body below. At the base of the White Turtlehead, there might be a nest of half-grown Baltimore Checkerspot caterpillars (pictured center and right). All of these caterpillars can improve their chances of reaching their butterfly stage when we refrain from raking, digging, and removing leaf litter in the vicinity of their host plants.





In violet patches during the winter, there are likely very young Great Spangled Fritillary and Meadow Fritillary caterpillars. Refrain from mowing, raking, and even walking in areas of violets. Be a lazy gardener.



Check before you prune. The caterpillars of butterfly species such as Viceroy and White Admiral overwinter in a hibernaculum (leaf shelter it creates like a sleeping bag that stays attached by silk to the stem). They finish eating in the spring. This Viceroy caterpillar ate in the spring and then could not fit back into his winter shelter.



Swallowtails spend their winter in a chrysalis that looks like a stick and is secured to sturdy stems, pots, decks, lawn furniture, and more. Use caution when pruning, pressure washing, and even rearranging pots or furniture.



These butterflies (Mourning Cloak, Compton Tortoiseshell) are some of the butterflies that overwinter in NYS in wood piles, out buildings, and under tree bark in their adult stage. They feed on sap and rotten fruit on warm winter days.



Many moths (e.g., Sphinx moths) are earth pupators, meaning they are in the leaf litter or just below ground with no cocoon to protect them. Note its vulnerable proboscis on the Hermit Sphinx whose caterpillar eats Bee Balm leaves. Leaf litter and brush piles left in place helps to protect them.



Clearwings such as this Snowberry Clearwing make a silk and debris cocoon on the surface of the ground, often hidden in gardens. Leave leaf litter in place.

Luna moth cocoons as well as other Silkmoth cocoons (Polyphemus and Cecropia also pictured here) are often destroyed from around their host trees during yard cleanup. Refrain from raking.

