

# What Do Butterflies Eat?

One of the most common questions we get at the Nature Museum is, “What do butterflies eat?” In order to better understand what they eat, we have to understand how they eat!

Butterflies have a long tongue, called a proboscis, which they can curl and uncurl to drink through like a straw. Because of their straw-like mouthparts, butterflies are mainly restricted to a liquid diet.

Butterflies use their proboscis to drink sweet nectar from flowers. Nectar sometimes resides deep within a flower and the proboscis allows the butterfly to reach this sugary treat. We fill the *Judy Istock Butterfly Haven* with an abundance of flowering plants that produce ample nectar for the butterflies, including: coral vine, firespike, jungle cucumber, *Ixora*, and *lantana*.

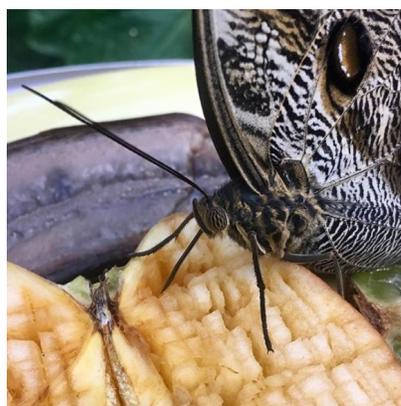
We also provide sponge pads soaked with simulated nectar for the butterflies. The simulated nectar is made by mixing honey and water.

Some butterflies also enjoy a different sugary treat, fruit. They especially enjoy fully ripened and rotting fruit. Why is that? As fruit starts to decompose it softens and becomes more liquid. Butterflies will eat a variety of fruit. We like to feed them bananas, apples, and pears. We poke each piece of fruit many times to make it nice and juicy and give space for butterflies to stick their proboscises.

Butterflies do not always eat for their own nourishment. Many kinds of butterflies, usually male, will feed on other moist substances like puddles, wet gravel, sweat, scat, and even tears! What these butterflies are often doing is gathering salts and minerals to pass on to female butterflies which helps with egg development. Sometimes a large group of butterflies can be seen feeding in this way together, a puddle club!



*Butterfly sipping on a nectar pad*



*Butterfly sipping on juices from a rotting fruit*



*Butterfly sipping minerals from bird poop*