

Monarch Magic

Hanging in “J”

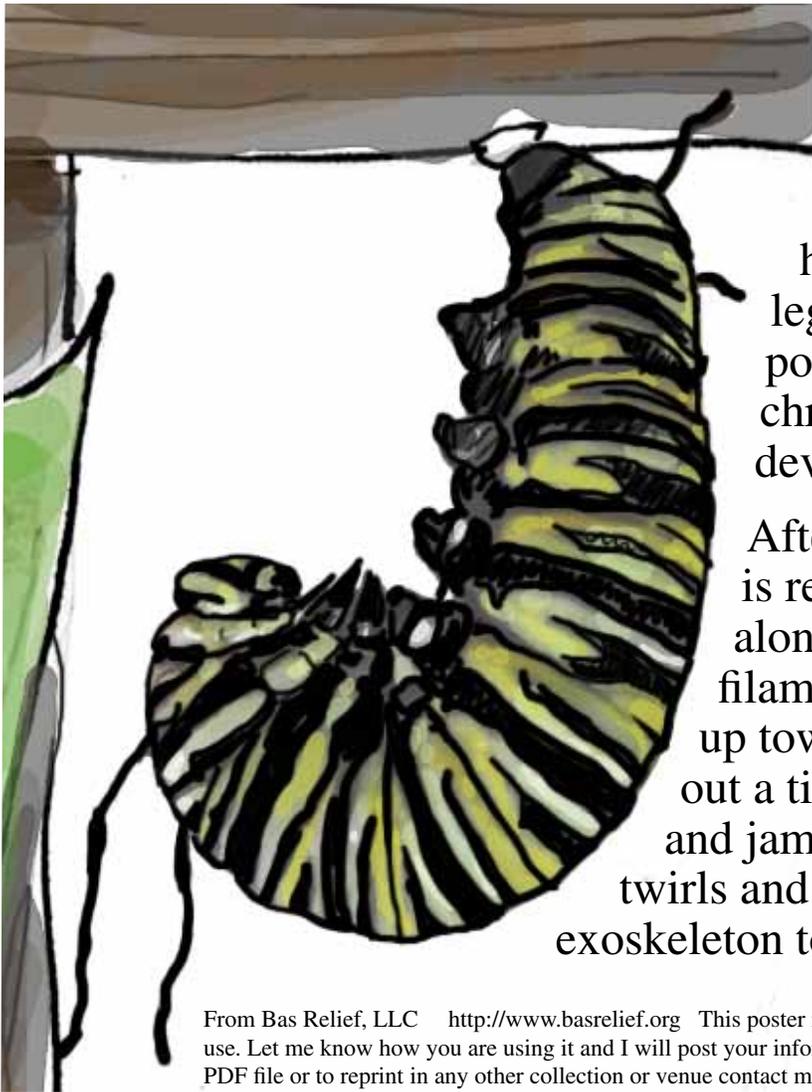
From the time that an egg is laid, the monarch butterfly form is developing inside each caterpillar. Special cells, called imaginal cells, inside the caterpillar are developing wings, long butterfly legs and antennae, and the special butterfly mouth called proboscis. The last time that the caterpillar molts its exoskeleton, it will reveal all that hidden work in its new chrysalis form.

When it is about two weeks old and full grown, the monarch caterpillar will look for a special place to make its chrysalis. It will make a mat of silk threads, like it did every time it molted before. But this time it will spend a long time creating a wad of silk, we call its silk button, in the middle of the mat.

When it is ready it will grasp the silk button with its last legs and hang upside down. This is called hanging in “J.”

Inside the caterpillar is rearranging itself. Its hidden wings, antennae and legs are moving into the right positions to spend 10 days in the chrysalis form completing their development.

After about 18 hours the caterpillar is ready. It's exoskeleton splits along its back between its two front filaments and it wriggles to move it up toward the silk button. It draws out a tiny black stick-like appendage and jams it into the silk button and then twirls and wriggles to get the discarded exoskeleton to drop away.



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