

Taking Care of Caterpillars

By Deborah Birge, Fort Bend Master Gardener

Q: Why are my caterpillars leaving?

Many of us are enjoying the arrival of butterflies and are excited to aid in the reproduction of these beautiful creatures. We've planted host plants and nectar plants but wonder why are some leaving the flower bed? Entomologists speculate that caterpillars leave their host plants to protect themselves from predators. "Caterpillars frequently strip the plant, so to form a chrysalis on a naked plant would leave them terribly exposed," said Mike Quinn, an entomologist and founder of the Austin Butterfly Forum.

Given the above, and the high incidence of caterpillar mortality caused by birds, spiders and other predators, some are inclined to bring those wandering caterpillars inside to assure they have the best chance of completing their life cycle. Reasons for relocating a caterpillar would be to prevent overcrowding and chrysalis tampering from other caterpillars and to prevent hatching butterflies from spreading potential diseases to feeding caterpillars as explained at <https://bugguide.net/node/view/203352>.

