

Red Deer Hospice Society : PAINTED LADY BUTTERFLY RELEASE

THE PAINTED LADY BUTTERFLY

Vanessa cardui, or the Painted Lady, is one of the most common butterflies in the world, populating all continents except Antarctica. In nature, an adult butterfly lays eggs on Canada thistle, mallow, hollyhock, or another of its preferred caterpillar food sources - which are numerous across Canada.

When butterflies are emerging, a small amount of red fluid, called meconium, falls from their abdomen. This is not blood, but a metabolic fluid used to help form body tissue and facilitate transformation inside the chrysalis. When no longer needed, remaining fluid is released. This can continue to happen for several days after emergence and is natural; expect to see red fluid on or around the butterflies and their packaging.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU RECEIVE YOUR BUTTERFLIES

The butterflies should be kept cool and dark until the moment of release; they wake up very quickly (in just a few minutes). If you have a period of hours or days before the release, you may place your butterflies into a fridge between 6-7 degrees Celsius for the duration of the wait. It is important that your butterflies do not drop below 4°C; they may perish.

You can store your butterflies anywhere close to these temperatures, quiet and dark; a clean, fume-free fridge is the best. This will keep them calm and feeling safe, fooling them into thinking it is a chilly Canadian night. Our Painted Ladies are a northern butterfly and well adapted to life in cooler climates. To conserve energy, they will enter a state of dormancy and "sleep" until temperatures are favourable; you are mimicking this. This is a natural defense against unpredictable northern weather.

RELEASING YOUR BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies are creatures of sunlight, warmth and nectar, so you will find that they prefer sunny, brightly lit days and open environments, and will be attracted to flowers. These are things to consider when planning your release. Please take the butterfly's needs into account: they cannot be released in the rain, or at night. Plan your release for the warmest and sunniest part of the day, and no less than 4 hours before dusk, to give your butterflies a chance to fuel up and find shelter for the night.

When you are ready to release your butterflies, simply remove them from the cool environment. The butterflies will warm up very quickly, either by utilizing ambient temperature, or by basking in the sunlight and shivering their wings. When they are sufficiently energetic, they will fly. A warm butterfly will fly quicker; a cooler butterfly will take its time, providing a good opportunity for photographs.

We find that not all butterflies fly at once; some percentage might, but others will also head straight for any flowers, and others will remain in and around the release site and you. Chances of them remaining near your release location will be increased if both host and nectar plants are in the area.

