

“Uncommon Invertebrates”

Caterpillar of the Variegated Fritillary by Nadine Scott

Latin name: *Euptoieta Claudia*

Family: Nymphalidae

This caterpillar can be found eating the common blue violets (*viola sororia*) in your garden or the passionflower vine (*passiflora*). Many gardeners remove violets from their garden and then state they have never seen the variegated fritillary butterfly. The butterfly is common on the outer coastal plain. One must provide the host plants for the female to lay her eggs to attract them and keep them in your garden.



It is not recommended to plant the passionflower directly into the soil as it will “travel underground.”

A large pot with a screen over the drain hole is recommended, with a trellis or lattice to climb. The passionflower can grow 20 feet or more in a season. If purchasing a vine, be sure it is the native and not the tropical or red flowered one, as they will not lay eggs on it. Flowers are tropical looking in shades of lavender and white. The young caterpillars eat the leaves.

The caterpillars are small compared to monarch or eastern black swallowtails. If you have a cage for raising caterpillars, they are very easy to care for. They need habitat! Last year only three dozen or so were released. Approximately five years ago, 400 were released.

When the grandchildren were small, I would offer \$.25 a caterpillar. They learned to recognize the caterpillars and what host plants to search to earn “big money.” A great learning experience for them and I did not have to get on hands and knees to search the wild violets for cats.

Photo by Nadine Scott

References:

Illinois Wildflowers web site

[Butterflies of the East Coast](#) by Rick Cech and Guy Tudor

[The Life Cycles of Butterflies](#) by Judy Burris and Wayne Richards

June 2020