

**WANTED**  
**ALIVE IN YOUR GARDEN**  
 Variegated Fritillary Caterpillar

By Text Casey Laine

**Known Food Preferences:** Variegated Fritillary caterpillars feed primarily on passionflower, violet, and flax, but have also been found on purslane, lamb's ears, mayapple, and others. Caterpillars may feed at night and tuck themselves up against stems or the undersides of leaves during the day. When grazing on low-growing plants, they can often be found on the ground as they move from a depleted plant to a fresh one.



**Known disguises:** With glossy skin and vibrant colors, the Variegated Fritillary caterpillar is a striking garden visitor. Primarily red-orange, with longitudinal stripes in black and white on its back and sides, it bears a pair of black-clubbed spines on its head. Additional spines (called scoli) cover its body. It may reach up to two inches in length.

**Special Weaponry:** The bright red-orange coloring of the Variegated Fritillary caterpillar, suggestive of toxicity, may warn off predators seeking a meal, but if that doesn't clinch it, the abundance of black spines—common among brushfoot butterflies—serves as further discouragement. These spines may also provide some protection from parasitic insects, such as wasps and flies, looking to lay eggs.

**Winter hide-out:** In the South and Southwest, Variegated Fritillaries typically overwinter as adults, but in the spring they commonly migrate as far north as Canada.

**Reward offered:** When caterpillars have eaten their way through five or six instars, they begin pupation by suspending their bodies from an anchor of silk. The resulting chrysalis has a metallic sheen, from pale to bright green, with black markings and orange-gold projections.

**If capture is avoided:** From one of the most beautiful chrysalises emerges the flutteriest of butterflies. Their flight is low, with many dips for nectar. During breeding, males actively patrol for mates. Females deposit pale cream eggs singly on leaves or tendrils of host plants.

Variegated Fritillaries undergo multiple generations per year, with two or three broods in the North and four or more broods in the South.

Casey Laine comes from a long line of talkative women. She works as an editor, and publishes an annual anthology of fiction and poetry. In her spare time, she chases butterflies with her camera.

