

# A Native Butterfly Deep Dive:

## Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio rutulus*)



The Western Tiger Swallowtail are butterflies that belong to the popular 'swallowtail' group that is well-known for their vibrant coloration and characteristic triangular wings. These are active butterflies that prefer sunny habitats and can also be seen puddling in the mud, flocking together in large numbers. This species can best be located in the summer, especially between June and July.

# Description and Identification

## Eggs



Western Tiger Swallowtail Egg

Dark green, glossy, and spherical; up to a hundred eggs in total are laid singly on the undersides of the leaves of host plants.

## Caterpillar



For camouflage, the young caterpillars, as they hatch out, strangely resemble bird droppings. As they begin to molt, they turn bright green in color, with large, yellow eyespot marks studded with black and blue pupils. They usually hatch out around four days after the eggs are laid. They molt five times and can reach a maximum length of 2 inches.

## Pupa



The chrysalis is light brown with golden spots on the back, and about ten black spines protruding from the ventral side. The thorax or mid portion is distinctly curved, with the antennae having multiple short black spines.

## Adult Butterfly



**Color and Appearance:** Male and female tiger swallowtails look the same. The wings

have a characteristic triangular shape with protrusions in the form of swords at the bottom of the hind wings. **When the wings are open**, they show a white to pale yellowish white base with random black stripes and bands that run vertically. The hind wings consist of two blue spots at the inner corner. **When the wings are closed**, each of the ventral sides of the wings displays similar stripe patterns, while the rounded borders of the secondary wings have a cyan blue hue that runs parallel to the margin.

**Average wingspan:** 2¾ – 4 inches (7 – 10 cm)

**Flight pattern:** Gliding, with fewer flaps

Distribution	Western parts of the United States and the southern regions of British Columbia
Habitat	Common in suburban gardens, also found in meadows, streamsides, and woodland edges
Lifespan of adults	6-14 days
Host plants	A wide variety of host plants including willows, aspens, ashes, poplars, alders, and cottonwood
Adult diet	Flower nectar especially those of thistles, zinnia, abelia, yerba santa, and California buckeye

Sources:

<https://www.butterflyidentification.com/>

<https://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/>