

# Silkworms

*Bombyx mori*

**FACT SHEET**

## Introduction and Origin

Chinese first domesticated Silkworms around 5000 years ago, and for 3000 years the Chinese kept the secret of how to use them to produce silk. In China, there is a legend that the discovery of the silkworm's silk was by an ancient empress called Xi Ling-Shi. She was drinking tea under a

tree when a silk cocoon fell into her tea. She picked it out and started to wrap the silk thread

**Silkworms do not exist in the wild as the moth is no longer able to fly**

around her finger, she slowly felt a warm sensation. When the silk ran out, she saw a small larva. In an instant, she realized that this caterpillar larva was the source of the silk. She taught this to the people and it became widespread. There are many more legends about the silkworm. Silk was a luxury item and remained a Chinese secret until 6AD when two Persian monks smuggled silkworm eggs out of China in a hollow walking stick.



## Characteristics

Newly hatched silkworms look like thin pencil lines drawn on paper. Over the next four to five weeks they quickly grow into smooth, creamy white worms about six to eight centimetres long with shiny noses and yellow blood. On larger silkworms it is possible to see eight pairs of legs, claspers and a beating heart. Silkworms, like all insects, do not have lungs and breath through small holes in the sides of their body.

## Feeding

Silkworms have huge appetites, and their appetite gets bigger as they grow. They never stop eating during the larval (caterpillar) stage, so it is important that they have a constant supply of fresh Mulberry leaves made available to them. They will not eat wet, bruised or wilted leaves.



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They can survive on lettuce leaves, but a diet of lettuce alone will mean that they don't produce a good quality silk.

## Housing

Silkworms prefer a dry, cool, airy place. Keep their house away from direct sunlight and clean it out daily removing droppings and old leaves as Silkworms will suffocate if they are buried under rotting leaves. Placing a sheet of newspaper on the bottom of their enclosure will make cleaning much easier.

Learn more from the team at Kellyville Pets



## Lifespan & Breeding

The Domestic Silk Moth cannot fly because their body is too heavy in relation to their wings. They flutter around to find a mate, and only live just long enough to produce another generation. The female will lay around 300 to 500 tiny pale yellow eggs in neat, tidy rows before she dies.

The eggs hatch in Spring, and when first hatched the baby silkworms look like tiny short black threads. The newly hatched babies grow rapidly, reaching up to 70 times their original size over a period of approximately 4 weeks. The fully grown caterpillars reach 6 to 8 centimeters in size, and it is possible to see eight pairs of legs, a shiny nose, yellow blood through their skin and a beating heart. They do not have lungs, and instead breathe through small holes in the sides of their bodies.

Approximately 27 days after hatching the silkworm begins spinning its cocoon, which ranges in colour from white to cream to yellow. The cocoon is made from one continuous thread of silk. The silk thread is produced in the Silkworm's salivary glands, and this silk thread hardens upon contact with the air. The cocoon is completed in about 3 days. The adult silk moth will emerge from its cocoon in approximately 2 weeks, and the cycle begins all over again.

Further information on diet, hygiene, vitamins, Vets and much more is available from the team at Kellyville Pets.



At Kellyville Pets, we encourage responsible pet ownership.

Phone 9629 3282 OPEN 7 DAYS  
106B Windsor Rd Kellyville NSW 2155  
[www.kellyvillepets.com.au](http://www.kellyvillepets.com.au)

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