



February 2013 Bee-Mail



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Your mason bees are getting ready!

Spring bees (blue orchard, hornfaced, red rufa, cornuta) are beginning to slip from deep hibernation to "I'm beginning to wake up". Their stored fats that they survive on are about 75% depleted. If you're in southern states/countries, your bees could begin to emerge.

If your weather patterns show abnormal heat (above 50°F/10°C), it's vital that your hibernating bees be kept in a refrigerated environment. Please don't think that "nature will run it's course." Our global weather shifting does the greatest damage to the hole-nesting solitary bees. Why? [See our latest blog post.](#)

Summer bees (leafcutter) (repeat from last month) The bees should be harvested now. The bees are still larva, but they are hardy enough to be handled roughly. Place these leafy cocoons in a cocoon humidifier in your fridge.



Paint your mason bee house now



You've bought your mason bee house and are ready for the bees to happily nest in it. If you'd like to this mason bee house to match your paint color, or want to preserve the wood, now is the time to do it.

Place the freshly painted/stained/varnished house outside and in the sun to get rid of the fumes. A couple of weeks airing out should be fine.

You should consider using water based paint vs. oil.

The bees truly don't care what material the house is made out of. Strong PVC, metal, or a beautiful

shaped wooden house is simply a "dry home" to the bee. The choice is up to the discerning eye of the gardener!

Which hole is best for the nesting bees?



Spring bees typically nest in a hole that is 8mm wide (5/16") and about 15cm long (6"). Some bees might use a bit larger hole, and smaller bees might use smaller holes.

In general, the bee isn't too choosy. However, here are our observations with what the bee wants:

- Dark holes
 - Dry holes
 - Holes without too many cracks
 - Unique holes
- Holes near other mason bees
 - Holes that smell like someone's nested there before.
 - Holes they can see to fly into. (Not hidden)



What nesting material is best for you?

- Holes that open up and allow you to harvest the bees in the fall. Reeds, paper tubes, wood trays are all good examples.

- Holes that are easy to harvest bees from. Wood trays are the easiest, but the initial investment might be high for beginning mason bee raisers. They do retain the nesting scent which is GREAT for returning mason bees. If you are raising mason bees over a period of years, do consider shifting to wood trays.
- EasyTear tubes are inexpensive and allow you to unravel them easily.
- We have a [comparison chart](#) analyzing many options for you.

What NOT to use:

- Drilled blocks of wood. You will be unsuccessful due to pest build up over time. Bad news!
- Bamboo. Although seemingly plentiful, they are very hard to open.
- Plastic. Bees will use them, but plastic doesn't allow excess moisture to wick away from the developing bee in the summer. This lack of wicking can cause moldy cocoons.
- Cedar trays. There are natural insecticides within cedar that can harm the bees. It's best to steer clear of cedar.

USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative Grant



I attended the USDA SCRI “Aspire” project meeting in Florida last month as a member on the advisory board.

The project’s purpose is to determine the impact of managed (non-honey bee) and wild bees in almonds, apples, cherries, blueberries, and melons. It’s a 5 year project that is packed with top-level entomology/horticulture researchers. (Their website is [here](#).)

Two things concerned me from this meeting.

1. Out of 4,000 species of bees in North America, there are only five “manageable” bees known/used; honey bees, bumble bees, leafcutters, blue orchard bees, and hornfaced bees. **That’s it.** We need more manageable bees.

2. Out of the alternative bees being considered, we have VERY FEW bees available. That's going to impact the project and definitely impact future farmers looking to use these bees.

We need to find more bees. We need to raise more solitary bees.

Your backyard is a key to finding and raising these bees. Hopefully there are less chemicals killing bees around you, there is more pollen for longer periods of time, and more importantly, you care.

Please encourage your friends, workmates, family, and neighbors to think about raising solitary bees. You could give them a few nesting holes and have them sign up for Bee-Mail.

If you're unsure what bees are using your nesting holes, we'll have a program in place later this summer with one of the researchers who will assist identifying your bees. Stay tuned.

What you missed in Facebook...

We're continuing to gain more followers in [facebook](#), [twitter](#), and [pinterest](#). Our intent is to continually educate all gardeners about gentle solitary bees.

Here are a few topics we covered:

- Which is the best blueberry pollinator?
- Looking for garden writers to team with!
- Impacts due to the Spotted Wing Drosophila (ouch!)
- A wonderful use of wine corks
- We strive to have something posted daily.

In our next issue...

- House placement
- Mud thoughts
- How to place out your mason bee cocoons

Thank you for caring about raising solitary mason bees! Your success is important to us.

Dave Hunter, Owner

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