



August 2015 Bee-Mail



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## Mason and leafcutter bee activities and Alert

### Mason Bees

Right now mason bees are in a critical development phase.

#### In a normal summer:

Spring mason bees should be beginning a final development from larva to adult bee. If you were to open a few cocoons right now, you'd normally find legs just forming and the bees would be all white. *(The photo is about right for a "late-August" phase.)*

Bees need summer warmth to develop correctly. If it were too cold, your spring bees wouldn't develop into adult bees in time for winter hibernation.



#### **ALERT- What happens with a warmer-than-normal summer:**

With too much heat, development speeds up. Your mason bees become "complete" adults too soon and begin to consume their internal stored fats much sooner. As it is very warm, their metabolism is high and their consumption of stored fats is accelerated. Very likely these bees may run out of this life-preserving "fuel" mid-winter and die.

In the Pacific Northwest where Crown Bees is headquartered, we have enjoyed a wonderfully warm summer and as a result, I'm very concerned about our mason bees. You should be as well.

### What to do:

**If in the Northwest**, place all of your developing mason bees someplace cooler, like the north side of your house, in a cool garage, or similar. Don't place the bees into a refrigerator yet, but do have them in a cooler environment between 60-70°F. **Do not ignore me on this.** Northwest temperatures have been 10-15°F (5-9° C) higher than normal and I believe next year's bees are in jeopardy today.

If your summer temperatures haven't been that much above normal, than you can ignore my cautionary words. If you share my concern after reading this, open up one of your nesting holes (tubes/reeds/trays) and carefully cut open one of the cocoons located towards the front mudded end. This cocoon should hold a male that has lesser value than females. If the bee is white, most of your bees are likely on par in terms of development and should be fine. If the opened cocoon contains a black or brown bee then find a cool place for all your bees to rest until harvest.

## Leafcutter Bees

Depending on when you purchased leafcutter bees or when they emerged in your yard, they may be in a variety of states:

- Still flying... that's great! (We have a few more leafcutter bees for purchase through next week. Any order that includes leafcutter bees gets a second batch thrown in for free.)
- Finished flying. The eggs will have hatched and the larva are now consuming/have consumed the pollen/nectar mix and are patiently waiting for next summer's warm temperatures to have them emerge.
- If your outdoor summer temperatures are warm enough, your leafcutter bees may emerge a second time. The larva decided it was warm enough to go through its development phase again. *(This is a normal occurrence and there's not much you can but let them be.)*

**For some, Ants** may be an issue right now. Here's a note from Rachel of A&T Nursery in Long Island:

Regarding the ants, I did a ton of research and learned that cinnamon, cloves, cucumber and mint are huge natural deterrents for ants so I've put a pile of each around the post that the bee cabin is attached to and so far I'm seeing results.

## Why YOUR mason bees are important

Crown Bees will be asking for some of your excess mason bees this fall through our Bee BuyBack program.

### Why do we need your mason bees?

**There will be less mason bees available next spring:** Utah and Southern Idaho are a major source of mason bees. This past spring (*weather pattern changes again!*) began normally with most of their mason bees emerging. Unfortunately a three week snow storm came through just about after the bees emerged. Sadly, a high percentage of these bees died due to lack of pollen/nectar which will likely result in diminished numbers available for next spring.

**The "mason bee" demand is increasing:** As a result of our efforts, many gardeners and farmers are hearing about gentle solitary bees for the first time. The number of people desiring to raise mason bees in their backyard or farmers interested in using them in their orchard is increasing. When mason bees are used in orchards, farmers produce more fruits and nuts.

**We believe diversity is best for our food production.** Not only should we be using more than one bee for pollination, we should also be raising mason bees in multiple regions across North America.

**The Crown Bees mission is to secure our food supply through the use of better pollinating bees.** While the honey bee is a great *honey-making* bee, it is not the best *pollinating* bee.

- Honey bees carry pollen on hind legs which doesn't fall off as readily.
- Bees that carry pollen on their underside have more pollen falling off... making them a wonderful pollination bee. Both mason and leafcutter bees carry pollen this way.

We will need any excess mason bees you have this fall. Please strongly consider participating in our Bee BuyBack program. We will remind you in October and provide a link to information on our website!



## New strategic partners



Think about how you found out about mason bees. Was it through a friend, an article, or a local nursery or garden center?

I believe teaming with large organizations and popular websites increases the chance that more people like you will learn about gentle bees. More people raising mason bees has more food produced.

It may interest you to know that we now have relations with a few wonderful organizations:

- National Wildlife Federation, Old Farmer's Almanac, Mother Earth News and The National Garden Club, Inc. We hope to help their members learn much and encourage them to raise gentle mason bees. We believe BeeWithMe will become a key tool for their members to connect with others. Who have we missed? Please introduce us.

In addition to the Crown Bees' website, our products can also be found in a few other websites and national stores now or in the near future:

- Orchard Supply Hardware, Home Hardware (Canada), Tractor Supply, Proven Winners, Zulily, Territorial Seed Supply and hundreds of nurseries.

As we continue to reach more people, we are committed to provide quality bees, products, and free education to all.

As people begin to raise gentle bees, we hope they quickly realize that bees (and other pollinators) need a healthy yard with less toxic chemicals nearby. This movement of learning about and raising bees will hopefully create healthier yards, healthier farms, connected communities and more food on your table.



## Disease control, a distant concern and vision

I frequently read research studies and review forums from bee-monitoring groups to keep my fingers on the pulse of "all things bee." I do this to look for trends that might impact the growing mason bee industry.

We know there are a multitude of viruses, diseases, fungi and bugs that impact the honey bee. I strongly believe these are a result of moving the honey bees around the country on trucks which then spread these problems to other hives.



Today, the only "concerns" we have in mason bees are visual: pollen mites, chalkbrood, and parasitic wasps. Unknown hidden viruses/diseases are what scare me the most. These would be diseases passed from the mason bee queen to her eggs.

### Here's a fictional example:

A honey bee leaves behind the disease "deformed wing virus" in a flower for a visiting mason bee to get. (Science has seen this disease pass from honey bee to bumble bee.) The infected mason bee then leaves this disease on the outside of her mason bee house and other mason bees become diseased.

The virus is transferred to their freshly laid eggs. After harvesting cocoons in the fall, our gardener gives a handful of cocoons to her friend across the state. In the spring, mason bees emerge with deformed wings and leave that disease on the house for healthy mason bees to



catch. Again, the disease is sent to other gardeners or into an orchard.

We'd have little means of preventing this disease spread.

The mason bee industry can become very large because farmers gain so much additional yield when they use mason bees in their orchards. Understanding and developing solutions today is important.

Little governmental study or academic research is conducted on mason bees. The vast majority of resources are spent on the honey bee. I'm not saying this is wrong, but merely factual.

### **My thoughts for solutions:**

- Bring this up to the commercial Orchard Bee Association for protocol development. (This is already started.)
- Gain attention from government and academia to understand what diseases can be passed and consider what can be done to prevent the spread of them.
- Encourage as many gardeners in the US and Canada to raise mason bees as quickly as possible. Create a systematic means to distribute bees back to the state/province in which they were raised. Later, as the number of mason bees has increased, further regulate the distribution bees to tighter groups such as cities or communities. (Our Bee BuyBack program is already working along this principle.)

While I am concerned, I do remain optimistic. We won't be able to prevent disease, but to understand what it is, how it is transmitted and how best to control it are all steps to keep our bees as healthy as possible. Wise stewardship is key!

## **We are at the IGC next week**

Crown Bees has a booth at the IGC Show in Chicago next week. This is the largest trade show for nursery and garden centers in North America.

I'm excited to be there, but also slightly anxious as this is our first time.

- Will our booth attract attention from key business owners, managers, and buyers?
- Is our messaging simple to understand? Will passersby be able to quickly determine that they can sell gentle bees to their customers?
- We only provide quality products. How do we gently help people realize cheap raindrop shaped wicker houses with bamboo tubes aren't good for customers or their bees?
- Will I have a voice left on the third day?

If you're attending the show, stop by our booth. Charlie, Anna, and I would love to shake your hand, give a hug, or hear how we can support you.



## BeeWithMe Update



We had a small hiccup with technology a few weeks ago. Apparently a really cool feature we thought we could do isn't yet supported by Microsoft or Google. Rats. Thus, we had to redesign a portion of the code.

We're still planning for the beta version to go live within a month. This will be one awesome website once it's up and running with most of the bugs worked out.

## In our next issue...

- Not sure yet...
- BeeWithMe update

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

Dave Hunter, Owner