



December 2014 Bee-Mail



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2014 ~ What we're thankful for

If I were to single out one event to be thankful for in 2014, it's the increase in mason bee awareness. As our Bee-Mail readers know, we see mason bees as key pollinators for a sustainable food supply. The greater the understanding about this underutilized bee, the more opportunities we have to secure our future food crops.

We saw more mason bees being raised nationwide this past year, and more people buzzing about their amazing pollination. We thank each of you for helping create awareness by sharing your successes with others, and for raising bees to increase the population.

Here are some key events that the Crown Bees team and I are thankful for:

- **President Obama's creation of a [Pollinator Health Task Force](#)** in June. There are more than a dozen government agencies, including the USDA, EPA and NCRS, collaborating on solutions to return our pollinators to healthy numbers. Crown Bees was able to offer their services with mason bees last Monday in a comment program offered by the Task Force.
- **An increase in Bee-Mail followers.** We added 2,600 followers this year. All thanks to you sharing your bee raising successes, and our Bee-Mail with others, as well as other social media avenues. We now have about 8,600 people who care and are learning from this resource.

- **Teaming with peers for outreach to NW orchards** for their 2015 pollination season. Through collaboration with other bee raisers, we came up with enough bees to help farmers trial test mason bee pollinators next spring. Collaboration is key as we work together to perfect raising mason bees in orchards. We are thankful to the orchardists who are participating.
- **Partnership with the National Garden Club.** This amazing club of dedicated gardeners continues to teach mason bees to their members, neighbors, and communities. We look forward to their increasing success in 2015.
- **BeeGAP speakers.** For some people, it isn't easy talking in front of a crowd. The number of presenters willing to speak to their club members and communities increased last year. While we still have more requests than we have speakers, we are thankful for their efforts. As more speakers share their success stories, we are confident that the speakers bureau will grow. This has been an awesome start to getting the word out about raising mason bees for the food supply.
- **Joe Lamp'I** and his [Growing a Greener World program](#) on mason bees. Joe took a leap of faith to learn about mason bees and let his viewers experience the gentleness of this amazing pollinator. Carl, his editor and video producer, put together a great 23 minute show. I hope for a part two as we increase mason bee awareness...

Lastly, **the Crown Bees team.** A year ago, Crown Bees moved from a garage into an office/warehouse. Teammates were added, and each has awesome skills in their respective fields. We have a tight group with a passion for making a positive change to our world. With a small company, each person wears multiple hats. **Debbie** is customer service, all things financial, office management. **Tim** is purchasing, shipping, creating products. **Marci**, who works with Tim, handles most all orders personally whether she is creating or shipping. **Elsie**, who teams with me on all facets of marketing, sales, operations, and anything else. **Hien**, who does our social media and helps with research. Our shared vision is a big one. It's achievable with dedicated followers like you.

When gifting mason bees...



Do you have a couple of hard-to-buy for folks on your holiday list? You can't go wrong with mason bees for a unique and fun gift for a friend, family member, or neighbor. If you have a few extra cocoons, consider gifting a few this Christmas season. It's a gift that keeps on giving!

So how do you gift wrap hibernating bees? It can be a bit like wrapping up a gallon of frozen ice cream, and sitting it under a warm tree for a week.

What's wrong with pulling your hibernating mason bees out of the refrigerator for a week or so?

In nature, it's typically cool weather, and your bees should be deep within their hibernation slumber. A warm room in late December will fool many bees into thinking it's the right time to begin pollinating. While they might not chew out of their box and wrapping paper, they would have used up a huge amount of their stored fats. They won't last until spring blooms.

Two options to consider:

1. Gift wrap a note that says look in the back of the refrigerator's crisper drawer for a cool present...
2. Bring the cocoons out of the refrigerator on your gift giving day. After the cocoons "gift box" has been opened (and explained), return them to the refrigerator. A few hours out of the refrigerator won't hurt these slumbering pollinators.

Some final notes:

Help them sign up for [Bee-Mail](#), and advise them on the value of using a [HumidiBee](#) storage case. 😊

Christmas Crown Bees Coupon

The Crown Bees team met last week and discussed Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and our results from last year.

Mason bees are still fairly obscure to the gardeners of the world. Thus, no Friday/Monday HUGE ONE DAY SALE EVENT this year. It didn't really get noticed last year...

Rather, we thought about the people we wanted to reward. That's you, our Bee-Mail reader. As a result, we have a 10% off coupon code for you. Order any spring supplies now. Give the gift of mason bees to friends and family, or treat yourself!

The coupon code is valid between December 1st and the 25th and can be used as many times as you'd like. Use the coupon during checkout.



Lessons learned when shipping mud



Why clayey mud?

I've learned over the years how important good mud is to nesting spring mason bees. It's fairly simple:

No clayey-mud, no bees.

We investigated means to have good mud available to you, and found a dried clay that works well. The team experimented with how much dried mason bee mud was needed to have an adequate source for your bees' success.

Rather than ship heavy mud in the mail, which increases shipping costs, we felt that dry clay, without the water, was perfect. Follow the directions about how much [dried mason bee mud](#), add water, and presto! You should have an adequate mud source.

A customer in Texas complained that upon opening his complete raindrop kit, he found it completely saturated in a fine powder. He sent it back to us (thanks Perry) for us to see what he meant.

Wow. Talk about dried mason bee mud EVERYWHERE. It was quite a mess.

We package the mud in a very dense plastic bag with a squeeze-close top. Even with these precautions, dried mud was found everywhere. We don't want that happening again. What went wrong..?

We're confident the box sat in an unpressurized cargo hold of a plane. While full of dried clay, air was also closed in the bag. When the plane hit a high enough altitude, the air within the bag expanded so much that the bag popped like a pin into a balloon. The picture above is of mason bee cocoons that had the box lid tightly closed. That much dried mud went in there, all over the raindrop house, reeds, etc. Again... Wow.

Our Solution:

Tim and I discussed a solution that is fairly simple. We're now poking each bag with a pin and folding the bag over that pin hole. If our dried mud winds up in another unpressurized cargo hold, air will leak out of that tiny hole and very little mud dust will escape. 😊

Solving moldy cocoons in your HumidiBee...



A common question we receive starts similar to an email like this:

Hi .. We had friends over tonight and I was excitedly showing them my container of MB's... when I opened up the container I could see some white fuzz and some of them had what looks like a green mold. Not all of them are infected.

Did I do something wrong? Is there any hope? I was so happy to have 57 cocoons and looking forward to sharing them.

Do you think I could discard the infected cocoons and keep the remaining?

I feel sick about these cocoons. ... all the hard work by only 2 females.

Mold is an airborne spore that floats from nearby cheese or something old. With refrigerator air currents, mold spores may land on your cocoons and begin to grow. It's

not a big deal. While it looks bad, the mold just affects the outer cocoon if caught soon enough.

Solution:

Rinse the cocoons and the green/black padding in a mixture of 1 tablespoon of bleach to a cup of cold water. Remember, the silk cocoons are waterproof... after about 30 seconds, rinse them off under cold water and place them back into the HumidiBee. Don't forget that the green absorbent sheet goes on the bottom.

You might want to consider placing the HumidiBee into a small lunch sack. Oxygen will get through the paper and to your bees, but the mold spore shouldn't. You can also inspect them for mold as part of your monthly water level check.

Crown Bees Canada

Mason bees perform quite well in Canada. Not so surprisingly, about 15% of our readers are Canadian. However, for us to ship a package between Seattle WA and Vancouver BC, the box has to go across the US to New York, it's then shipped across the border to Ontario, Canada, and shipped clear back across to British Columbia. (This is the USPS path, which is the lowest cost.)

Not only does it take a long time, it's also expensive.

A good friend of mine, Gordon Cyr, has joined us as Director Operations, Crown Bees Canada. I met Gordon, who lives on Vancouver Island, BC, through the Orchard Bee Association. Packages will be shipped from there and Canadians can use CAD (Canadian dollars). This should save time and shipping costs for customers.

Some of our products will be built in Canada. All bees will be Canadian raised. *I hear they buzz in both English and French...!*



When you visit our [home page](#), you'll see a US or Canadian flag. Click on the flag, choose the store you want and you're on the same website with a different store! Nothing really changes other than the store is now in CAD, and we ship with the Canadian Post.

We're proud to team with our friends in the north.

Feedback from our Orchard meetings in WA/OR



Two OBA teammates and I met orchard owners and fruit cooperatives two weeks ago in Washington and Oregon.

Two concepts really hit home with the audience.

1. A large almond growing company is purchasing about 100,000 honey bee hives to keep them as healthy as possible. But the hives will only be used in their almond orchards. That's about 5% of the available commercial honey bee hives now pulled off the pollination circuit. This trend may continue.

2. Mason bees fly in colder temperatures (high 40's if sunny and emerged) than honey bees who prefer 60+. Mason bees are superior cross pollinators due to the way they gather the pollen on their abdomens rather than sticking it on their hind legs. Once nesting, wind isn't an issue with mason bees. Honey bees will typically remain in their hives on windy days.

For farmers who are always analyzing "risk mitigation", the above concepts were a big deal to them.

We later met with interested farmers in their orchards to discuss solutions. It was quite a week.

I'll be in Stockton this Wednesday meeting with cherry farmers.

December 3rd, 10am-11:30am

Mokelumne Room, Cabrahl Ag Center

2101 East Earhart Avenue, **Stockton, CA**

I've opened the Orchard portion of our website to all viewers. You can visit the page [here](#).

Your excess bees belong in commercial orchards. We're still actively receiving your bees through our [Bee Buyback program](#). Thank you, each of you, for your participation! Keep those bees coming!

Adopt A Bee program is working!

Last month we introduced the [Adopt A Bee](#) program. I was pleasantly impressed! Quite a few Bee-Mail readers partnered with local nurseries or garden clubs to share mason bees with their communities.

Gardeners will see mason and leafcutter bees in various cities like: Wescoville, PA; Yuma, AZ; Casper WY; Avon IN, and others.

Thanks for helping educate others that there are easy-to-raise bees in the world!



In our next issue...

- We'll talk about a crowdfunding program starting, our plans for the new year, and results on farmers.
- I'll discuss what to inventory for the spring. 😊

Happy Holidays!

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

Dave Hunter, Owner

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