



February 2015 Bee-Mail



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### **Winter bee secrets**

**The mason bee fuel tanks are about 1/3 full right now. Leafcutter bees still have plenty of fuel.**

If you were to open up your spring mason bee cocoons just now, you'll find adult bees ready to fly. However, your leafcutter bees are still larva hibernating larva.

Mason bees placed into your refrigerator in the fall will survive well into April. As long as they're kept cool, these slumbering bees consume their stored fats very slowly. When winters are warm at the wrong time, wild bees may emerge only to find no pollen and then die.

We don't want that.

Refrigerated bees are healthier when you release them because they don't use up their energies too early.



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**Question of the Month:**

Are we causing harm to southern mason bees stored in refrigerators that have never experienced cold winter temperatures?



*Great question!* From all I have read, cold temperatures really don't affect bees' bodies the way it does ours. Their "blood" is vastly different and, if frozen, doesn't damage their organs. Cold temperatures simply slows their metabolism and reduces their consumption of valuable fats.

Quick Tip: Don't forget to add water to your refrigerated bees [HumidiBee](#). Dehydrated bees will not survive...

## Getting your mason bee house ready for spring

It's time to check the condition of your mason bee house.

Is it moldy and neglected on a back wall, fence post, or tree? If so, spend a few minutes cleaning it up.

Take it down and wash it off. Now is a great time to paint, varnish, or stain your house. Once you've done that, set it outside in the sun. The sun cures the paint and should break down any bad odors that might offend your bees.

If you are looking to replace your old house, Crown Bees has some [new designs](#) (We have a few new ones this year.) Your local nursery may also have some fun designs to choose from. Almost any material is suitable for a mason bee house: metal, ceramic, wood, plastic, etc. The house's purpose is to keep the nesting holes dry



Your house should have about 2-3" of overhang to keep the rain out. When you mount the house, tilt it slightly forward so any water that gets in will drain out.

### Tips for house placement:

- In a visible location, about head height.
- On a wall under an overhang is best – although in orchards we place them stout limbs.
- Stable and non-moving. Mason and leafcutter bees need to find their holes readily by sight. If the house moves, your bees will leave or not nest there.
- Catch the sun early and long. A southeastern facing wall is best for most climates.
- If your climate is hot, make sure the house gets some afternoon shade.



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## Which nesting hole is best?

For the health of your bees, we recommend harvesting cocoons in the fall. Some *don'ts* first:

- **Don't use drilled blocks of wood.** Bees may nest here – but so will the pests! Diseases and mites will build up in the holes and can quickly kill all your bees.
- **Don't use bamboo.** Despite being widely available, bamboo tubes are brutally hard to open. And if you don't open them, pest build-up kills your bees. Other issues may include: the holes are too big for bee nesting, the tubes are glued in and can't be removed, or the bamboo has been cut in the wrong spot so that the natural nodes close off the tube.
- **Don't use plastic.** It traps moisture and can cause moldy cocoons.

### Recommended materials for nesting holes:



**Paper tubes.** These are the lowest cost and bees will use them readily. [EasyTears](#) from Crown Bees are easier to open than other paper tubes on the market. Ours have a back with a hole in the end so that you can see if it was used or not by bees. If you can't see through it, a bee nested in it. A neat trick to open these is to toss the whole tube into a bucket of warm water for about 10 minutes – it loosens up the glue and the cocoons stay dry!



**Reeds.** A bit more expensive than paper tubes, but mason bees love these the best. This is because each [reed](#) is unique and bees return to their holes via sight. When we offer a mixture of reeds, paper tubes and wood trays, the bees always fill up the reeds first.

Opening the reeds is easy. Just crack the end with your fingers and pull them apart.



**Wood Tray.** Quality wood trays last a long time. The nesting scent from the previous year stays on the wood creating a natural mason bee attractant. Many orchards use them. Although expensive at first, they are significantly lower cost over time. We carry [96-hole](#), [48-hole](#), and new [12-hole](#) trays. The trays are held together initially with white bands. They now also come with really thick green rubber bands for the following years after the white bands are cut off.

These are VERY easy to harvest cocoons from. You clean them with a stiff kitchen brush.



**Insert Refills.** For added protection against parasitic wasps, the [inserts](#) are placed within paper tubes. Because they are thin, they are very easy to open. Although very low cost, do NOT use them without an exterior tube or parasitic wasps will have a heyday killing your new larva over the summer. These inserts can also be used safely in drilled blocks of wood, if your holes are 8mm (5/16"). Snip off any excess length, but leave about 1/8" so that you can pull them out to harvest.

Many retail stores and nurseries carry Crown Bees houses and nesting holes. If they don't yet, ask them "why not?" 😊

## Order mason bees now

Our mason bees in our coolers are still in "moderate" hibernation. Later in March and April the mason bee stored fats will be very low and any warmth during shipment will wake up a few males. It's a fact of nature: warmth in March/April = bees emerging. Even in shipment!

If we ship your bees NOW, however, they'll be safely in your refrigerator before their low fat stores signal it's time to emerge. Fewer mason bees will emerge in shipment. We'll continue to ship cocoons through April, but shipping in February is the best time for your bees.

**You should order your bees now and store them in your refrigerator**

We now have a plethora of bee choices on our website. Through the [Bee BuyBack program](#) we receive bees each fall from gardeners like you all over the country! These bees have been carefully checked over, cleaned up, and stored at the correct temperatures and humidity levels.



Choose bees based on your region and climate. For instance, we have mason bees from New York and hornfaced mason bees from Oregon. We also have two types of "basic" mason bees: bees that are acclimated for NW & NE *cooler* summers (daytime 70 - 80°F) and bees that do best in *hotter* summers (daytime 80°F+).

Keep in mind that both of these mason bees will do well with normal spring temperatures. The difference shows up when *the larva develop in the summer*. Their larva development and hibernation cycle will coincide with the cooler or hotter summers where they evolved.



**Hot summer requirements in a cool region:** You have a spring mason bee that should develop from larva to adult bee in hot summer temperatures (80+°F). If these bees wind up in a cooler summer temp in the 70's, they won't be complete adults by the fall. You'd have mostly "white almost-complete bees". Not healthy black bees. These bees won't survive the winter.

**Cool summer requirements in a hotter region:** You have a spring mason bee that should develop from larva to adult bee in cooler summer temperatures (70-80°F). If these bees wind up in a hotter summer temp in the higher 80's for a long time, they will develop into adults too soon. Now, as adults waiting for hibernation in hot temperatures, their metabolism is too high and they consume an enormous amount of their stored fats. They typically won't survive the winter because their stored fats will be depleted too early.

### Here's the bottom line:

Choose mason bees either by average summer temperatures. For instance, Western WA, Oregon, and NE states would purchase [cooler temperature bees](#). Most all other states would choose [hotter summer bees](#). *For those that have already purchased bees, we did this for you automatically.* If you live in a normally hot state, but have cooler temperatures due to elevation, choose the [cooler summer bee](#).

If you want bees already acclimated to your state, choose the specific state bee near you. As the Bee BuyBack program continues to expand, we'll have 47 states represented and most provinces of Canada.

**Note:** The specific state bees have limited quantities. We've already sold out of the Pennsylvania bees. If you don't find your specific state bees, the hot/cool bees will do just fine.

**Nurseries that carry Crown Bees mason bees have the correct bee for your local region.** If they aren't bees from us, ask your nursery where the bees were raised.

## Protecting your bees from global weather change



Like it or not, the world's climates are changing. California has a horrible drought. Winters are longer and shorter across the globe.

My concern is that our bees in the spring rely upon "normal temperatures" to emerge. In general, they emerge around the time plum and cherry trees are in bloom. When we see quick temperature shifts, our trees might not be in bloom when the bees emerge.

For bees stuck in late spring situations, they might have consumed too many fats and either die in their cocoon or chew their way out in snowy situations to die anyway.

Our food supply is important. Native bees are important. We need as many bees surviving as possible. **if you haven't harvested your bees yet and they're still sitting outside, it is not too late to harvest them now and toss them in the refrigerator in a HumidiBee.**

You can place the bees outside when you feel it's the right time. If a snowstorm is approaching, let them out afterwards...

## Bee With Me

You know about the honey bee problem and I'm sure you'd agree that we need to protect our food supply by taking the stress off honey bees and supplementing them with more native bees in our gardens, farms and orchards.

This is a big deal.

I'm excited to share with you a simple solution: **Building a bee network in backyards across America.** We're calling that network **Bee with Me.**

**Bee with Me** will help people learn how to raise bees, share a map of Bee Boosters in their area, list places where they can buy supplies and more. Chat within their community, have rewards, etc. We have a prototype of that website in production. You can see it [here](#). (Please understand this is a prototype...)



This web platform will connect garden clubs, Bee Boosters, local farms, nurseries, sustainable communities, pea patches, etc.

Our intent is to have this site useful, helpful, and fun.

However, this takes resources that we don't have right now so we've decided to try crowdfunding to raise the capital needed to build awareness and fund the network.

**I will need your help too.** When the time comes, I'll need your help spreading the word. Tell your friends. Share on social media. Donate. I'll be sending an email when the campaign launches and whatever you can do to help would be much appreciated. Stay tuned!

## A local garden design company is making a difference



[The Artful Gardens](#), a Seattle based landscaping firm, teamed with us last year. That's Sue, the owner, wearing tan.

We sold them towers and 96-hole trays and mason bees to place in various customer's yards. Their customers received great pollination and in all cases, the amount of bees increased.

We helped them harvest this year and they had an additional 1,700 bees to exchange for more houses and trays this year. Next year we'll just buy back their excess

bees.

This was a win/win for everyone! The customers paid for pollination, more bees were raised, and Artful Gardens is known to be an ecologically balanced company. I'll bet Sue's team ensured there was plenty of pollen and mud!

I hope more landscapers decide to try Sue's pollination plan! 😊

## Crown Bee is at the Seattle Flower & Garden Show

The Crown Bees team voted this last summer... Let's have a booth at the [Seattle Flower and Garden Show](#) in February.

It's right in the middle of our busy season, but we thought it would be a great way to reach more gardeners.

And thus... we have our products in a booth at the show. Today we're in just Seattle. As we continue to grow, we hope to be in more garden shows near you! 😊

If you're attending in Seattle, stop on by!