



## BeeMail Newsletter

### WHAT'S IN THIS MARCH 2016 ISSUE

**MONTHLY TIPS & REMINDERS** - Placing out mason bees

**BE CAREFUL WHEN BUYING BEES** - Ask these questions before you buy

**TWO NEW PRODUCTS** - Finally, our Mud Box and a new product: Stone Raindrop

**RECENT NEWS ON NATIVE BEES** - Why mason and leafcutter bees matter

**SUSTAINABILITY TIP FROM DEMARUS** - Soil, the foundation of all plants

**CAN YOU PLEASE RATE US?** - We've learned the power of your influence

**Dave will be speaking at Molbaks**, Woodinville this Saturday (March 5 at 10am)

### MONTHLY TIPS & REMINDERS

✓ **TIP** Placing out mason bees. Only place out mason bee cocoons if you have these requirements met:

Mason bee house, holes, and mud are set up correctly. **Read more.**

Adequate pollen is available. (Dandelions are out, cherry trees or similar fruits are beginning to blossom)

Weather for the foreseeable week isn't stormy or snowy. While bees can handle small weather bumps, you will be more successful to wait a few days if in doubt.

Placing your bees out to emerge is easy! We want your mason



bees to memorize where they came from. If they crawl over the nesting holes, it's helpful. So, place your cocoons either loosely or in a small container (dixie cup) behind your tubes/reeds/trays, or on top of them. Don't place your cocoons on top of the house as things might blow over.

Think through wind protection and beware of the cocoons as perfect "bird treats." If it's windy, ensure your cocoons won't blow out. If you are concerned about birds, place chicken wire (3/4" holes) on the front of your mason bee house.

By placing the cocoons out in the evening or early morning, We believe they're more likely to hang around.

Many of you may be concerned that your bees may not be coming out when you want them. Please, rather than call us, read this web page I wrote this week that answers a lot of your questions about when should they emerge, what to look for, etc. [\*\*Read more here.\*\*](#)

#### ✓ **TIP Pre-emerging mason bees**

If you have an early blooming tree, such as a plum, that might be too early-blooming for your mason bees, you have three choices.

1) Do nothing 2) Hand pollinate your tree with a feather duster or mittens 3) Pull a few mason bees out of hibernation early.

To pull mason bees out of hibernation early:

Using sharp scissors, you can cut the cocoons and let the bees out early. See this [\*\*video\*\*](#) I took a few years ago.

A simpler method can be to place a portion of your mason bees into a small container in a dark warm room (like a furnace or hot water heater closet) for a week. Check on your bees periodically. When most bees have emerged, cool the container in a refrigerator for 10 minutes and then place the mason bees on the top of your nesting holes. (Cool bees are less likely to fly away when you open the container. You can then easily place them on your nesting holes.)

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## **ASK THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE BUYING MASON BEES**

### **1. How do you know your bees are pest free?**

Many mason bee producers sell unopened tubes/reeds of bees. When bee producers raise a lot of bees, they do this in a "monoculture" fashion where there are more bees raised than is normal in nature. Pests and disease can easily move from hole to hole, bee to bee. We have seen this first-hand, and that's why we teach you to harvest cocoons in the fall.

A woman purchased 5 tubes of bees from a mason bee dealer and opened them with me at my desk yesterday. We found chalkbrood, pollen mites, and moldy cocoons. Out of the 5 tubes, she received 14 cocoons.

Just because a mason bee hole is mudded over does not mean that it is full of cocoons. When I buy something, I'd like to know that I'm buying quality and that I'm getting my money's worth.

#### **What should you do if you've already purchased bees?**

Open the reeds/tubes before you set them out. If you find all healthy cocoons and they meet your expectations, then that's awesome. If you find less bees, chalkbrood, or pollen mites and this does not meet your expectations, I'd call your vendor up and have them send you bees to meet your purchase. Let them know they should harvest their cocoons.

**What you should expect:** When you purchase any species of mason bees, they should be loose and not in the tube. They should have been inspected by the company, cleaned, and sold to you with the correct female to male ratio. Good management practices means that chalkbrood isn't spread to your native bees, pollen mites aren't released to your yard, and you're receiving the amount of bees that should work in your garden or orchard.

#### **2. Are these bees acclimated for my area?**

Just because someone is selling an alligator does not mean you should buy it for your backyard - unless you live in Florida.

**You want to purchase bees that are acclimated to your area.** Mason bees of western Washington State should not be sold to Michigan, where the summer temperatures are too hot for bees acclimated to cooler summers. Probably bigger than that, "Bees raised in one place could have diseases not found in the other region." We don't want to spread diseases that harm local bee populations.

**What you should expect:** When you purchase bees, find out the company's policy on where they were raised. If they won't tell you, or they aren't from your region, don't buy them. Our bees are raised in multiple states of the US and Canada and we organize our bees based on location of origin.

#### **3. Are these bees native to my area?**

**Similarly, if a bee isn't native to your area, it should not be introduced.** Crown Bees can find and sell a mason bee called *Osmia algaia* from Oregon and northern California. We decided to not raise or sell this bee because it only lives in OR/CA and nowhere else in the nation. If a bee isn't natural to an area, it will either die or it could become an invasive insect that displaces native bee populations.

Mason bees, (blue orchard and Japanese hornfaced) are found in most all provinces and states but in Florida and just along the gulf coast boundary. While these bees are native or naturalized, introducing bees not from those regions increases transmission of diseases and the bees may not survive due to temperature differences between the two locations.



Chalkbrood ([Read more](#))



Pollen Mites ([Read more](#))

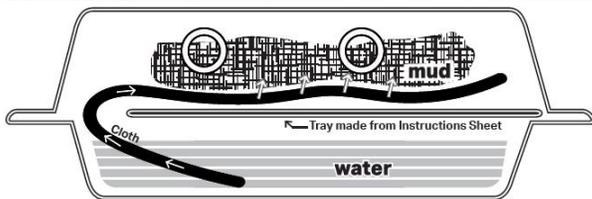


### Two qualifiers:

The Japanese hornfaced was introduced to the US in 1984 and sent to multiple cities in the US. While not native, it is *isnaturalized* and we can't get rid of it because it is very hard to tell the difference among mason bees in cocoons. So, we accept it as it's a great pollinator. Crown Bees is choosing to sell "mason bees" raised in regions and sold back to that region. Meaning, the bees may or may not have a mix of blue orchard and hornfaced.

Our leafcutter bees, while raised in Saskatchewan, are found in all states today and acclimate easily. They originated from Europe and were introduced to North America about 60 years ago. We've checked with science to ensure that what we're doing is ethical to the bees.

## INTRODUCING OUR MUD BOX & STONE RAINDROP



I'm really proud of this new invention we've produced to ensure mason bees get the right type of moist, clayey mud.

Place your mud (or use ours that's included) on top of the "black water transporter". The water stored below is wicked up to the clay and lasts for a week or two. Four mason bee doors are just the right size to prevent frogs from eating them on the ground. What could be cooler than this?

In our NW bee-raising grounds we're going to conduct an experiment to see what type of bee cocoon increase we'll have this season. On Vashon Island are 225 bee raisers. A random third will get the Mud Box... We'll report those results to you in a future Bee-Mail.

I'm confident mud is the number one issue impacting mason bee returns. I'd try it out if I were you. We have it at a fairly low cost!

### **Order the mud box.**

While our Guatemalan wood raindrop was a great seller, we found that about one in twenty cracked earlier than we'd like. Quality is very important to us and we needed to replace it.

We found a wonderful pottery shop in Colorado who could make the same raindrops in clay then bake them to stone. We love the design and durability. Each is unique and handmade.

We're substituting the stone raindrop into our previous kits. You'll have a choice of either white or



chocolate colors!

**[Order this here.](#)**



Our 4mm tubes for the smaller eastern US states is shipping to us this week. We should have them available on our website by end of next week. Consider placing these out amongst your 8mm mason bee tubes/reeds/trays this spring.

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## **FINALLY! NATIVE BEES ARE GETTING ATTENTION ~ THOUGH NOT GOOD NEWS**

As Crown Bees continues to grow every January we ensure that we revisit why we're in business.

- We have to be ethical with all we say, do, and sell.
- We have to tell the truth always.
- If we learn anything new, we provide that information for free.
- We continually reinvent our products. Do they all work for the bees? Can we do something better?

Today we're all about mason bees. In the future we will still be "all about mason bees" and add sustainable products. Our bat house (next section) is a good example. In the distant future we will be working alongside farmers helping them understand



## about live vs. sterile soil.

A report conducted for two years by multiple researchers across the globe concludes we are losing too many native pollinators.

"We are in a period of decline and there are going to be increasing consequences," said report lead author Simon Potts, director of the Centre for Agri-Environmental Research at the University of Reading in England.

And it's not just honeybees. In some aspects they're doing better than many of their wild counterparts, like the bumblebee, despite dramatic long-term declines in the United States and a mysterious disorder that has waned.

The honey bees, because they hold most the attention, get the primary research funding. It's nice to see native bee awareness get some attention. And it's not too late.

"There are relatively simple, relatively inexpensive mechanisms for turning the trend around for native pollinators," said David Inouye of the University of Maryland, a co-author of a couple chapters in the report.

One of the biggest problems, especially in the United States, is that giant swaths of farmland are devoted to just one crop, and wildflowers are disappearing, Potts and others said.

Wild pollinators especially do well on grasslands, which are usually more than just grass, and 97 per cent of Europe's grasslands have disappeared since the Second World War, Potts said."

Read the whole article [here](#).

It will take some time before mainstream media, researchers, farmers and gardeners understand the value of native pollinators. Articles like this are slowly shedding light on their value.

- We have to tell the truth always.

As Crown Bees begins to gain attention from some of the big box stores, we'll be able to introduce native bees to the masses. We hope this new awareness changes millions of yards to use less toxic chemicals, grow more food, and decrease the size of our lawns by growing more flowers for wild pollinators.



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# SUSTAINABILITY

I will never be able to say it often enough, sustainability is a verb, not a noun. We **practice** sustainability, but only after we have thoughts and feelings that lead to decisions which lead to action. David Suzuki, Canadian scientist and environmental activist, recently gave a talk about sustainability and he did a wonderful job of describing how important our views of place influences our words and actions. ([A video of his speech](#)



**can be found here:** David Suzuki: An Elder's Vision for Our Sustainable Future)

How we view the world is the foundation of our actions and our lawns, yards, and soils are the foundation of healthy places to raise our families. I want to take this time to introduce the **Crown Bees blog** and give you an idea of what topics I will be talking about.

I may not be the best gardener, but I am passionate about raising awareness about environmental issues and empowering people to go out and actively participate in "doing". I believe that if we know the history behind a behavior it becomes easier for us to change the behavior. Being able to question and understand why we practice a behavior is key to guiding ourselves towards more sustainable and more practical behaviors.

Why do we have lawns? Did you know that lawns became a status symbol in the 1600's? What if we could change our view of lawns today in order to help pollinators?

Lawns were an easily visible signal to others that the homeowners could afford to leave some of their land out of production. Lawns are pretty to look at, and the grass feels good to walk on, but the way lawns are defined today are not helping feed our wild bee populations. To a bee's view, a lawn is a green desert, devoid of any pollen.

My hope is that we can begin discussing the history of lawns and our views of their functions can begin to change to include local plants, local weather, and local beneficial bugs. We have to begin changing our definition of a beautiful lawn, especially in light of the UN's report on world-wide invertebrate extinction.

The first in a series of entries about lawns, microbes, worm-composting, and fertilizer will be posted soon. I hope you enjoy reading and are inspired to think about the many ways to act sustainably.

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Demarus Tevuk Sandlin  
Environmental Program Coordinator

## RATE US PLEASE!

We're trying hard to help people understand the value of native bees as well as sustainable practices that enhance our planet rather than harm. The Crown Bees team is very active with Facebook and has great conversations with all who comment. You may not be aware that Facebook only shows a small percentage of our posts on your wall. If we pay, a higher percentage shows up. Good for Facebook as it helps them be profitable.

We can also gain more views if our rating is good. Under the **reviews tab**, please take a few seconds to rate us! We truly appreciate this!



✓ Call 1.425.949.7954

Based in Woodinville, Washington, we are a company that's trying to make an impact, learn, solve a looming food shortage problem, and bring light to important sustainable topics.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

♥ **The Crown Bees Team**

***Dave, Debbie, Charlie, Tim, Marci, Billie, Danielle, Emily, Demarus and now Kyle***