



May 2013 Bee-Mail



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When is it too late for spring mason bees?



Mason bees overwinter using their stored fats to hibernate on.

1. If your bees had an awesome summer developing at normal temperatures, they should have been nice and fat, ready for hibernation.
2. If you refrigerated your bees through the winter, their metabolism was kept very low and they consumed their stored fats slowly.

As a result, fat bees, stored carefully through the winter can hibernate safely through early May. Bees that have lost their stored fats **HAVE** to nibble out of their cocoons, even in a refrigerator. The females can hibernate for a bit longer, but they will be absorbing their eggs to sustain them.

By now, all of your bees should be outside. We do have a few healthy west coast mason bees that we can send your way (if you live in the Rockies and west!).

Strange mason bee nesting habits...

Here are some strange things that you may observe this season:

- A mason bee will nest in a hole and then use the hole adjacent to her if available.
- Mason bees may create a smile shaped nesting pattern in your tubes, trays, or reeds at first. We believe they like to fill the bottom row first, then left or right sides, and then fill in the middle. Why? I suggest that it's because these holes are easiest to find first. And thus, first capped with mud first!
- The mason bee sleeps in her hole at night. You can count nesting females in the evening with a flashlight and count tails/heads.
- A fertilized egg ends up as a female bee. A non-fertilized egg is a male. The females, which are the most valuable eggs, are laid in the back of the hole. This is

done to protect the females from pecking birds (or other marauding pests) which can reach in only so far with their beaks.

- If you see bees going back into your cocoon emergence box/carton, it is males looking for females. I'm sure the scent drives them crazy!

Don't lose any bees to a simple problem

Bee proactive! This photo taken in the morning should make a producing mason bee owner very happy! What's wrong with this picture?



This photo was taken about midway through the season. We have 20 or so bees visible and about 30 reeds that look "empty". I suggest that **almost all reeds have been chosen by a female in this picture**. When a female finishes her hole, she immediately looks for a new one. If you don't have a hole available for her, she will fly elsewhere! *You've now lost the opportunity for a lot of extra mason bees!* Here's a photo taken only 3 days later. (All holes were filled and after I added a ton of reeds)



Your lesson learned: Please ensure that you have extra [tubes, reeds, or wood trays](#) in place now rather than lose bees. This is pivotal to increasing your number of mason bees. We'll send the material out immediately. Many west coast nurseries carry mason bee products! Remember, as part of [BeeGAP](#), we'll exchange excess cocoons for nesting material in the fall.

An embarrassing orchard experience

A collaborative partner of Crown Bees and I are conducting trial pollination with mason bees in eastern Washington cherry and pear orchards. We've taken a few videos of these experiences and stored them in our Youtube channel.



First, here's a picture of us placing out about 5,000 cocoons in the pear orchard. Watch the video of this [here](#). Next, we think through mud, which we believe may be an issue. The pear farmer (Diane) has said she'd keep the holes wet that we dug in between trees throughout the orchard. At the cherry orchard, the owner is absent and the soil is too dry. See a [video](#) of our solution.

I visited both sites yesterday and was extremely disappointed in what we allowed to occur. The pear orchard (10,000 mason bees in 40 nesting trays on 8 acres) had ZERO nesting mason bees. See this [video](#) from yesterday.

On a similar sad story, in the cherry orchard, we found 9 of the 12 buckets had the hole in the bottom get clogged with the result that most of the mason bees here (11,000 in 7 acres) had left as well... but not all! Near the three functional buckets of water dribbling onto the soil we had a few nesting bees. One is yellow in the face due to the pollen left on her from a previous visit to the surrounding blossoms.



Our lesson learned is HUGE. If you haven't heard me say this yet, MUD MATTERS. Not gooey mud, but rather moist clayey-mud that a bee can easily excavate, pick up, and pack it into a mason bee hole.

We will be working on a solution for next years. Many Facebook contributors had some good thoughts today.

BeeGAP is gaining momentum!

[BeeGAP](#), **Bee Gardener Adding Pollinators**, has been gaining media attention in a variety of ways.

Randy Bigbie, of North Carolina, began talking with us about what he could do for the farmers around him. A few short months later, he's wild trapping hornfaced and blue

orchard bees in a variety of backyards, farms, and orchards. He's become a local celebrity and recently appeared on a local TV station due to his efforts. Not only do I applaud his passion, I'm proud to team with him. He's one great guy who is making a difference. See his interview [here](#).

The **Carroll Cox show**, in Hawaii, watched our [BeeAction](#) show and has requested that we announce BeeGAP to his worldwide listeners this Sunday. Alisha Forrester Scott, one of our BeeGAP teammates, is co-producing the show for this Sunday (May 5, starting at 8:05 AM, Hawaii time. 1:05 PM EST) The show can be listened to live at this link: <http://carrollcox.com/>. We'll have on the show: Alisha, Carole Sevilla Brown (national garden writer), Dr. Steve Peterson (almond pollinator & entomologist), Randy Bigbie, Joe Fahey (Wisconsin Organic farmer), Howard McGinnis (Hawaiian Bee Keeper), myself, and potentially Dr. Suzanne Wainwright (the Bug Lady).

BeeSWeek at the [Albuquerque Film & Media Experience](#) occurs next month June 3-9 at Nob Hill in Albuquerque. This will be an amazing leap forward for BeeGAP. We have 4 panels lined up at the University of New Mexico with various "real" people that are making a difference. These sessions will be streamed live as well as recorded. The panel topics are:

- State of the beeS address: The current situation of our available pollinators used today in North American crops.
- Lessons and experiences of currently managed types of bees: An analysis of four bee industries.
- The farmer's usage of chemicals, their available expertise, and known, potential and sustainable alternatives:

A discussion of today's practices from the perspectives of the farmer and the pollinating contractor.

The farmer's usage of chemicals, their available expertise, and known, potential and sustainable alternatives: A discussion of today's practices from the perspectives of the farmer and the pollinating contractor.

- BeeGAP as a keystone home garden solution: A grassroots, collaborative effort teaching gardeners to create healthy yards, natural bee habitats, raise solitary bees to assist the farmer in crop pollination, and ultimately assist in wholesome food production.

Panelist include Paul Wheaton (Permies.com), Carole Sevilla Brown, Dr. Gordy Wardell (Almond's Paramount Farm's Senior entomologist), Dr. Bruce Milne (Univ of New Mexico with sustainability), and quite a few more. The panels will be moderated by Hawaii's Tina Quizon.

What is important about the AFME week is that the producers of AFME believe strongly in BeeGAP. They are showcasing this solution to worldwide film and media experts. This message of hope for our future food supply will gain much traction.

“Your backyard is vital to our future food supply. Bee successful.” We’re going to spread this message everywhere. You’re already on board. Thank you for your support.

For those questioning the spelling of BeeSWeek, the reason is there are more bee**S** out there than just the honey bee. 😊

New bees to try out!



Western states can purchase the California bee now. This bee is similar to the blue orchard, but differs that the californica prefers aster-type plants. This bee is gentle, and uses “chewed up leaf bits” rather than mud for its pollen/egg chambers.

To learn a bit more, read here: [Californica](#)

We also have the **leafcutter bee** available for gardens of North America.

We’ve learned a few lessons from last year! This gentle mason bee overwinters as a larva. When you receive the cocoons, they must be warmed to temperatures of 80+ degrees for 4 weeks for the bee to shift from larva to adult bee. (if cooler temperatures, it takes a bit longer.) This bee is a general pollinator and should pollinate gardens!

During this transition period, many pests stepped in to prevent this wonderful pollinator from developing. Ants, parasitic wasps, “wormy looking things”, and a few other pests had feasts on cocoons across the US. As a result, we created a “shrunk down” version of our BeeGuardian bag to a protective enclosure called the “LeafGuardian”.

Developing leafcutter cocoons are kept in the LeafGuardian until you notice the first bee emerge. At that time, it’s safe to place all cocoons behind/on top of the nesting material. We also were able to find a source of seasoned leafcutter boards that smell like leafcutter bees. A seasoned board will have bees nest there over other places. New wood trays, smaller reeds and easytear tubes will be fine for nesting as well. See all leafcutter bees and equipment [here!](#)



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:

- Mud pictures and solutions
- What a mason bee egg look like
- Energy solutions for healthier bee
- Transferring bees from blocks of wood to new nesting material
- Chemicals in the news

In our next issue...

- What's happening with your bees
- Wrapping up the spring mason bee season and thinking through the next

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

Dave Hunter, Owner