



**May 2014 Bee-Mail** 



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***In our current Issue:***

**Spring Mason Bee Activity**

- Bees have to be released
- Do you have enough holes?
- Pest protection
- Chemicals in your yard
- A great last minute deal for you

**Summer leafcutters**

- Incubating leafcutter bees
- A new small leafcutter tray

**Summer Bumble Bees**

- Gardeners want bumble bees!

**Mason bees have to fly!**

*If you have cocoons that haven't opened up yet,*  
there are three possibilities:



1. You still have the cocoons in your refrigerator. **GET THEM OUTSIDE.** Their stored fats are depleting and they will soon expire. Don't worry about cold temps at night.



2. They have been outside for a couple of days and have not yet emerged. They may be too weak to chew through their cocoon husks. If you think that this is a possibility, **help them out immediately.** Cut the cocoon open with a sharp pair of scissors. Cut around the edge of the cocoon just snipping off a little of the pinched cocoon shell. To see me do this, [view a short video](#) near the bottom of this link. Place the bees on dandelions or a sponge with Karo corn syrup on it. Watch their tongues come out! They should reward you by soon taking to flight.



3. The cocoons are actually trojan horses. Mono, a parasitic wasp and mortal enemy, has replaced your larva last summer with her own larva. These larva hibernated inside the cocoons and are now developing into full fledged adult wasps ready to infect your mason bees' eggs. If the bees haven't emerged, and you don't want to open them up, **THROW THEM AWAY.**

### **Not enough holes has your bees leaving**

#### **We said this last month... Don't lose bees because they couldn't find available holes!**

- Each female owns her hole until she fills it with eggs/pollen and caps it off with mud.
- Check once a week to make sure there are vacant holes for the nesting bees to fill.
- If all holes are either filled, or already owned by another female, your bees will leave your yard and fly elsewhere.

**When replacing holes, try not to alter positions of any tubes/reeds.** Mason bees know precisely where their hole is. They find them visually, and also possibly through "BPS" (Bee Positioning System 😊) They'll hover

where they think their hole was... If you have room, add empty tubes/reeds on top of your nesting material or replace a tube/reed carefully in the same position. An extra tray should have its own house rather than waiting until the first one is completely full.

**Count the holes that are filled.** If 40%+ full, then you should [add extra nesting tubes](#).



Remember, we'll exchange your excess cocoons in the fall for free tubes/reeds/trays.

Thus, buying extra tubes now won't cost you much in the long run! (See our [BeeBuyBack](#) program.)

Don't forget about [moist clayey mud](#). If you haven't had rain for a while, consider digging a hole in the ground and allowing the groundwater to keep the soil moist. *This remains the #1 reason for bees leaving...*

## What pests are bugging your bees?

Last month we wrote about birds. What other pests are there?



If you find tubes awry, or see other bugs about, here's the question you should consider:

**What is the pest looking for? Only then should you think through your solution.**



An **ant** maybe looking for pollen, but more likely hunting a freshly laid egg. They might not be that big of a pest unless you see a lot of them. Other than squish them one by one, we don't think chemical control is prudent.



**Earwigs** are looking for leftover pollen and a place to hide. Rolled up wet newspaper someplace close has them nesting there rather than in your tubes. Dispose of the rolled paper often.

**Squirrels** and **rodents** are more than likely looking for larva. Keeping chicken wire in front should keep the squirrels away. Mice... no good answer.



**Cuckoo bees** are bees that unbelievably lazy and sneaky. You'll see them lurking on the outside of tubes waiting for our mason bees to almost finish filling a chamber with pollen. They'll run into the chamber, kill the egg, and lay their own egg in the gathered pollen. Although they are bees, they typically have no hair on them making them look more "wasp like". UC Berkeley has a [great article](#) on these.

Bears are looking for the larva and gathered pollen. My solution is to let them have their way. 😞



**Kids throwing rocks** at your mason bee house are looking for something to do. A solution might be to bring them in closely to see what's going on. Help them realize that not all bees sting and that these bees are providing fruit for later on... (Invite them back to help you harvest in the fall!)

#### **My thoughts on pests:**

Nature is complex and looks to balance itself. I don't like a rose in my grass or grass in my rose bed. *It's me that has the problem, not the flower or plant.* To eradicate a pest because I don't like it has me fighting nature. Inevitably, I'll lose. It's important to understand *why it's there* first, which causes me to think through the solution with a bit more patience and wisdom.

## **Creating a Bee Haven : Less Chemicals**

**We add chemicals to our yard for multiple reasons.**



**One: It's easy.** You don't want moss, so it's easy to apply moss killer. Same philosophy applies to aphids, mites, midges, mosquitoes and weeds.

**Two: It's what you are told to do by the "experts".** The experts typically want you to buy their product. I strongly suggest talking with your local nursery experts on organic solutions.

**Three: You bought it years ago and you can't throw away money.** Do your yard a favor and safely dispose of anything you didn't use last year. Don't give it to a friend.

**Four: You don't realize that chemicals have crept into your yard without you knowing it.** Big box garden centers and nurseries want to sell "perfect" plants. They know customers won't buy plants with holes in leaves/pedals. Most of these plants have neonicotinoids sprayed on them or the seeds have been soaked in a chemical bath for systemic insect control. When you plant these in your yard, these plants continue to kill indiscriminately. *It's wrong.* Tell your nursery that you care. Only with active voices will change occur.

## A great last deal on mason bees

### We are releasing our remaining mason bees to pollinate

in wild settings on Tuesday May 6th.

Order any [mason bees](#) we have left (already on sale) and we'll send you either double or more per order.

Thus, order 1 set of bees and receive 2 sets.

Order 5 sets and 10-12 sets.

Buy 10 and we'll send you 25...

**Our bees need to pollinate, not sit in a cooler!**



For some reason, the New York regional bees were “unavailable” on line. 😞 We still have quite a few as a result... They are acclimated for the entire NE region!

## Leafcutter Bee incubation tips



The leafcutter bee is a general pollinator and gathers pollen from most flowers/blossoms in a yard. They nest in smaller holes than the mason bees, but can use the same house. Your leafcutters have overwintered as larva and need to develop into adult bees. In perfect 84°F (29°C) weather it takes about 23 days for the bees to begin emerging.

### **What to do:**

- You don't have to develop them all at once. Keep half or more in your refrigerator for later release. They'll be fine through early July. Keep them in a [HumidiBee](#) or similar container so that you don't dehydrate them in the refrigerator.



- When you are ready to incubate them, keep the leafy cocoons in the LeafGuardian bag. We found that parasitic wasps, ants and other pests enjoy munching on these tasty morsels. (*Meet Bailey, our warehouse dog. Isn't she just the cutest?*)
- If temperatures are low around you, keep the cocoons inside. It will take around 6 or so weeks for them to mature. Our impatience on the cooler west coast inspired us develop the [IncuBee](#), which holds a steady 84° temperature and shortens the incubation time substantially!
- If temperatures are high 70's to 80's+ and you are incubating them outdoors, place the cocoons in a shady spot (on a porch, in a shed....) where you can watch their activity. Bees may emerge between 3-5 weeks.
- Once the first bee (typically a male) emerges, place all cocoons on top of the nesting material (tubes/reeds/trays.) The rest will soon emerge.



If you find little black wasps emerge, these are pteromalus, a parasitic wasp that lay their eggs in freshly laid leafcutter eggs. Squish 'em when you see them! The small black things seen in the LeafGuardian above are pteromalus. These pests are found around commercial leafcutter bee operations (where these bees were raised) and are best controlled by killing them when they emerge.

## Introducing the Leafcutter “Bungalo” cartridge!

The leafcutter bee is a smaller bee preferring a 6mm hole rather than the larger 8mm for the mason bees.

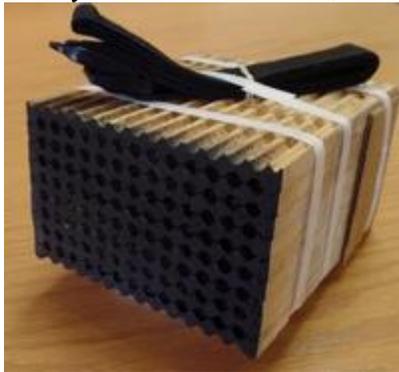
We're trying to keep your costs down so that you don't need to order a new house for these summer bees. We are introducing the [Leafcutter small wood tray](#) which fits perfectly inside the BeeAdventure house.

When your mason bees have finished flying, swap out the tubes/spring bee bungalow with this leafcutter cartridge. It has 20 holes, which will support about 10-20 nesting leafcutter bees.



Three of these fit nicely within the Raindrop house!

You can also order the [Leafcutter BeeBungalo](#) as a kit. Or [as a kit with 50 leafcutter bees](#). We have the [Leafcutter medium wood tray](#) that supports 50-100 nesting females which fits nicely within the Chalet, Tower, diamond, and EZ Bee Shed.



## Gardeners want Bumble bees!

We've heard back from many gardeners and have quite a few gentle bumble bees now headed towards gardens.





The Bumble bee “*Bombus impatiens*” is a native bee that just pollinates, but lives a long time.

These bees are extremely healthy and will pollinate for 8-10 weeks. They make wonderful garden companions. The *bombus impatiens* is a hardy bee that can be commercially raised for crops and greenhouses.

The bees are shipped overnight in a cardboard box, and are easily transferred to either of our new designs, the BumbleBode or the BumbleBarn.



Native bumble bees queens have already prepared their first brood and are now being taken care of by their workers.

When you receive the bees, this is about the same situation you’d find... the queen taken care of by 30-40 active bumbles.

In reading about them, it’s quite easy to see why they’re gentle. No communication between the workers has them much less sophisticated and needing to “defend the hive.”

## In our next issue...

- What to do with your newly laid mason bee eggs. We’ll teach you how best to protect them
- We’ll uncover some new tips about leafcutters bees

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