



## November 2014 Bee-Mail



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### **Your hibernating bees**

Spring mason bees are actually adults within cocoons at this time of year. You missed seeing the fun of toddlers (small larva consuming pollen) and adolescent youth as they metamorphoses within their cocoons.

Just like sleeping bears in a cave, they are now surviving on their stored fats.

Today, their fat deposit tanks are just about full and will slowly drop over the next 4-6 months as the bees use this for nourishment.



Your bees aren't doing much. No movement, no bee talk with their neighbors, just deep hibernation. This lack of movement conserves their stored fats.

Cold is their best friend at this time. Lower temperatures keep their metabolism at a slow pace. If the bees are exposed to a warm spike, their metabolism speeds up and they consume that precious fuel faster. That's why a refrigerator works best; it keeps their metabolism very low. Place all cocoons and larva within your HumidiBee for placement in your refrigerator.

Summer bees and beneficial wasps are toddlers... either they're still larva, or they have spun a cocoon and are waiting for warm spring/summer to metamorphous through adolescence into adulthood quickly.

Don't forget to put water into your HumidiBee or other overwintering container. Too much water is better than too little as your refrigerator will dehydrate your bees.

If you see mold on your cocoons, relax, it's not going to kill them. It's easy to treat. See our [solution](#) within the HumidiBee instructions.

## Weird things found in harvest

We receive a lot of interesting photos from mason bee raisers across the world asking, "What's this?"

We're able to answer most of the questions we get from photos, but not all. For those really weird ones, we ask for the actual cocoons so we can ship them to our friends in the Logan Bee Lab for identification. (Unfortunately we couldn't help a few gardeners in the UK as it's illegal to ship foreign bees to the US.)

Just last week, Lori, from Minnesota, sent us a few photos worth mentioning. I saw this same situation years ago, and wished I had a picture to describe it. (I do now!)



A female bee gathered pollen and forgot to stop, lay an egg, and then seal that chamber with mud before starting her next hole. She just kept on gathering pollen day in and day out. I don't see a mud cap on the reed or small wood tray, meaning she just kept on going to the next hole, I guess. What an amazing pollinator! (But a forgetful mom as she didn't leave any kids to benefit from her work!)

We also find bees may not do anything to a hole other than place mud over the ends repeatedly. It's kind of disappointing when you get excited about opening a tube/reed/tray and then find an empty hole. Dr. Chris O'Toole, from the UK, years ago said that he felt some mason bees must go through a bit of dementia in their latter week of life and just forget the complete sequence; pollen, egg, *and then* mud...

Lori also found this tiny bug scurrying around her trays. We have this bug in the Pacific Northwest as well. In the photo to the right, these bugs are seen in the hole to the left of the cocoons.

In discussion with an entomologist, we think it may be a good bug? It moves very quickly for a bug, meaning that it is probably a predator rather than prey. That's how things roll in the animal world... fast gets the slow prey almost every time.

What to do about it, and what is it eating? I'd leave the trays in the garage and let the bugs do their thing with your trays. It may be consuming pollen mites? I don't know at this time..!



It may also be a second stage pollen mite that latches onto the back of our mason bees. If/when we learn something, we'll report back to you.

## Cleaning wood trays

### Keeping it simple to protect next season's bees

Wood trays are the easiest holes from which to harvest. And they're reusable, reducing your investment costs over several seasons. An added advantage to wood trays is that they retain the nesting scent from the previous year. This attracts and retains your bees. With a bit of cleaning, they will be safe for next season's bees.

How clean should they be? Not that clean. You want to preserve that wonderful nesting scent!



After harvesting the cocoons, just clean each top/bottom of the tray with a stiff kitchen brush, nothing more. Leftover mud, pollen stains, etc. are all fine left in each hole.

There are some native bees that use tree sap as their nesting material. That's a pain to remove as the hardened sap is brutal to chip out. While it's neat to see a new bee arrive, cleaning up after them is no fun if they use sap.

ONLY wash trays IF you find [chalkbrood](#). A simple spritz of a bleach/water solution will kill the residual spore. We suggest having a small cup of bleach water and an old toothbrush handy. If you find chalkbrood in a channel, brush just that channel (top and bottom). This will clean the affected cavity without stripping the scent from non-affected cavities. Immediately band the wood trays together so they don't warp.

## Announcing "Adopt-A-Bee" program

**Our #1 challenge to helping gardeners learn about mason bees is simple: Awareness.**

That's it... awareness. Awareness that there are gentle bees that a gardener can easily manage and pollinate their yard. There are over 4,000 species of bees in North America, and of those, about 130 or so are "hole nesting bees," like the spring blue orchard, hornfaced, and leafcutter bees.

We'd like your help in spreading the message of gentle mason bees. Elsie, one of our teammates, came up with a great idea, [Adopt-A-Bee](#). We'll team with you to help spread awareness to botanical gardens, pea patches, and wherever else *you* think it might make sense to raise mason bees.

Here's how the program works:

1. Choose a public garden where you'd like to place mason bees for pollination and education.
2. Fill out the [form](#) on our website.
3. Sponsor or co-sponsor a BeeWorks Chalet house with a local nursery or garden club. (We give you and your team wholesale pricing.)
4. You now have both spring and summer bees, a house, and all accessories for success.
5. Place the house and bees in the public garden, and manage the bees when they are not flying and pollinating (team up within someone or take them in yourself, harvest, and hold them through the winter).

That's it. You have now created an enormous benefit for your community. Hundreds to thousands of gardeners (and young future gardeners) will walk past the mason bee house and learn what you already know. There are gentle bees that are amazing pollinators for yards and gardens.

We have much more information on the website about this program. We're excited to team with you!

Here are various BeeWorks houses with wood trays. Missing from these shots are the accessories (HumidiBee, BeeGuardian, InvitaBee, Mud) and bees!



## Bee BuyBack report

Our Bee BuyBack program is in its second year of success! Last year we received bees back from gardeners across the nation.

This year, we're seeing double the amount of bees coming in. THANK YOU! Whether you have 50 extra or a few thousand, each set of bees allows other gardeners to begin understanding the benefits of these gentle bees.

As of this morning, we've received back about 33,600 bees from 49 mason bee raisers! Way to go!



The [Bee BuyBack program](#) rewards you with free nesting holes or a gift certificate to our store.

While it's best to receive bees now early in their hibernation, we'll accept bees through the end of the year.

Help us rehome bees to other gardeners or commercial orchards across the nation!

## Reaching out to Orchard Managers in WA/OR/CA

If you know of any orchard managers near these three cities, please pass along this message.



Crown bees is teaming with peers to hold three informational meetings for orchardists. We'll discuss **Managing Pollination Risk in Orchards with Mason Bees**.

We have three meetings set up:

**November 18th**, 10am-noon  
WSU Tree Fruit Research & Extension Center  
1100 N. Western Avenue, **Wenatchee**, WA

**November 20th**, 9am-11am  
Mount Hood Winery  
2882 Van Horn Drive, **Hood River**, OR 97031

**December 3rd**, 10am-11:30am  
Mokelumne Room, Cabrahl Ag Center  
2101 East Earhart Avenue, **Stockton**, CA

Please have your orchard friends contact us at [info@crownbees.com](mailto:info@crownbees.com). They can get more information and sign up on the Orchard section of our website. We'd like to know they're coming.

We have enough bees for about 1,000 acres of orchards. That's about 1 million mason bees. **A majority of the mason bees that Crown Bees will use were raised in backyard gardens like yours.**

## Creative ideas for gardener gifts

The holiday gift season is almost upon us. Here are some ideas for things you can do yourself for that special gardener on your list.

**Introduce a gardener to mason bees:** Gift wrap a few of your extra mason bee cocoons (be sure to keep them refrigerated until gifting time!)

**Make a bee house:** Be sure to include a roof overhang on your house to protect the nesting material from rainy weather.

**Make your own nesting material:** If you make wood trays, be sure the holes are large enough for your bees (about a pencil width in diameter.) Find your own teasel, Japanese knotweed, or roll a few holes out of printer paper.

**Please remember, no drilled blocks.** While this is simple to do, there is no way to harvest the bees. In a couple of seasons, drilled blocks tend to become bee cemeteries full of mites and pests and no bees.

**Help a gardener get started:** Offer your time and advice to set up a bee haven with what you have learned about raising mason bees. (Less lawn, more native plants, few-to-no chemicals, etc.)

*No time to do it yourself?* Order online or purchase a gift certificate from our website.

Dawn Pape, a wonderful author from Minnesota, wrote a book titled "**Mason Meets a Mason Bee**". We were honored to review her draft and provide a few photos. Dawn has clever wording, a very expressive son, and fun pictures in this book. It would make a great children's book for Christmas. It's designed for children in K-5. We have the [book available online](#), but won't have the books to ship until later this month.



Let us know your creative gift giving ideas for that special gardener on your holiday list.

## In our next issue...

- I'm always amazed at what topics we're able to write about. So, next month, expect something fun and exciting! (Meaning, I don't have anything formal planned out yet.) 😊

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

Dave Hunter, Owner

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