



September 2015 Bee-Mail



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Why you should harvest your bees

Harvesting protects your bees from pest invasion and increases their survival rate while hibernating. There are a variety of pests that can be easily removed during harvest which prevents their damaging effect to next year's mason bees.



Hitchhikers such as pollen mites (the bee to the left is covered in these) overwinter in unharvested holes. Next spring, your emerging mason bees carry these mites into your yard producing even more mites. ...which reduces your bee population the following year and you have more mites in more holes... you get the idea.

Harvesting your cocoons is important to help ensure that you have healthy bees for next year's

pollination.

This Bee-Mail provides you an overview for harvesting. Visit our website for detailed information, including demonstration pictures and videos.

If you have drilled blocks of wood or strong bamboo, you're out of luck with protecting your cocoons. In general, these holes become mason bee cemeteries over a period of years. We strongly recommend shifting to holes that can be opened. We'll remind you about this in January and provide instructions on how to make the switch to harvestable nesting holes.

How to harvest your cocoons

Harvesting cocoons is quite easy. It is a wonderful fall activity to share with children, neighbors and friends.

If this is your first time to harvest, relax... The cocoons are waterproof and very durable. It is extremely difficult to harm your bees.

AS you harvest, you will discover small (left male) and large (right female) cocoons, mud, leftover pollen, larva poop, and maybe some unusual cocoons and miscellaneous nesting insects.



Here's an overview. You'll find more information on the Learn page of our [website](#). You will also find a very detailed set of harvesting instructions that can be printed.

Gather some harvesting tools: Paper to cover your kitchen table, a table knife or pair of scissors, sand or water, a bowl or two, a colander/sifter, good music in the background, a HumidiBee to store cocoons, and a trashcan for pests.

Open your [paper tubes/reeds/or wood trays](#). (Each link takes you to the product page. Look at the instructions tab in the lower section.) If snipping the end of a paper tube, realize that the first cocoon is a ways down. There will be a thick mud plug followed by an empty chamber, then a bit of mud before the first cocoon.



Separate cocoons from everything else. The most frequent pest you will find is the pollen mite. The yellow or orange looking "sawdust" is actually thousands of little mites. We have a video of what they look like under a microscope in our [pest section](#).

Be wary if you find a chalky dark gray or black larva shaped "crescent moon" in the hole. This is chalkbrood, a spore that transforms mason bee larva into spore piles. If you find this, it's a big deal and you'll want to wash your hands, cocoons, and wood trays with a bit of bleach water to keep this from spreading. You can read more about how to treat this [here](#).



Clean your cocoons. Your cocoons are very durable. You can drop them on the ground or blast them with water without harming the bees inside. Swirling cocoons in sand then sifting cocoons out, or agitating cocoons in a bowl of cold water are simple means to remove mites that could be clinging to the outside cocoon fibers.

In the picture above of the male and female cocoons, the black specks are fecal matter left as a result of the larva eating the pollen. It's all natural and nothing to worry about.

What else did you find while harvesting?

More than 130 species of bees and a few solitary wasps use holes to nest in.

All hole-nesting insects will protect their laid eggs with some nesting substrate. Each species will use what is available at that time of year.

- Spring mason bees will use mud.
- Summer leafcutter bees will use cut up sections of leaves.
- Some bees will use chewed up vegetation, resin from trees or cottony parts of plants.
- You may find solitary wasps that will use mud or grass blades.
- You may also find big grubby larva with no cocoon around them separated by something.

In all cases, celebrate! It is wonderful that your yard is healthy enough to attract these beneficial insects and that you helped out these insects with habitat. Well done.



Sundberg)

Chewed up leaf bits (From Bill



Cut leaf bits (Leafcutters!)



State bee)

Tree resin (A Washington



Pebbles (A wasp we're told?)



Grass blades (*This by Heather*

Holmes)

When you find larva or grubs, grassy or leafy cocoons, we suggest to not completely open the hole. Place these somewhere safe in your garage in a protected container. Simply set out the nesting holes next spring.

Send us photos of what you found. We'd like to post them in our next Bee-Mail, on our website, or in social media.

Storing cocoons for the winter

Our weather patterns have proved to be a bit unusual the past few years. Late springs, very hot summers, droughts, and everything in between.

Our want is to have as many bees as possible survive for next season. Solitary bees that nest in holes can be particularly vulnerable to abnormal and erratic temperatures as there is not "ground mass" to regulate temperatures for them.

Bees overwinter on stored fats within their bodies. The colder it is for the bees, the lower their metabolism and they consume less of these precious stored fats. Thus, a cooler bee has a greater chance of surviving into a late arriving spring. (As an example, in the Pacific Northwest we enjoyed a very long, much warmer summer than we would typically experience. As a result our mason bee larva from this past spring developed at a faster rate and as a result began consuming precious fats a month sooner than normal. We may have fewer wild bees next spring due to our abnormally higher temperature summer.)



Placing hibernating bees into a refrigerator isn't going to kill them, in fact it is a great place for them. In particular, the spring mason bees and summer leafcutter bee species that are in most states/provinces survive in Michigan/Saskatchewan. That says that a refrigerator at 34-35°F (1° C) will be just fine for your bees.

The major concern of refrigerators is dehydration and mold. Consider storing your cocoons in a [HumidiBee](#) or similar storage container that keeps the cocoons dry, but the air around them humid.

Leafcutter bees, unusual cocoons, larva between mud, etc... We recommend that you close the

hole back up and place these in the HumidiBee as well, however, we suggest storing these in a cold garage/shed. In the spring, you're going to place these holes out with your spring mason bees and let them emerge when they are ready to through the spring/summer season. Why not in your refrigerator? You may get mold on cocoons/tubes and if left in its tube, it would be tough to treat with bleach/water.

Monthly place a teaspoon or so of water on the pads in your HumidiBee. We'll remind you to do this through Bee-Mail. You may find mold growing on your cocoons. Understand that mold is an airborne spore that moved through the air within your refrigerator from some source and is not that big of an issue if caught early on. Again, we'll help you through the winter with instructions on how to handle mold.

Results from the IGC trade show in Chicago



Charlie (right), Anna, and I met a plethora of nursery owners, managers, and garden center employees in Chicago last month on the Navy Pier. This is one of the largest trade shows for independent garden centers.

Our favorite topic (gentle bees) was talked about repeatedly and as a result, we should hopefully have many more nurseries in the Midwest through east coast now selling mason bees and supplies.

We weren't surprised to learn that the vast majority of the visitors had no knowledge

that there were any bees but honey or bumble.

We hope their customers will learn as you have, that mason and leafcutter bees are easy to raise, fun, and awesome for gardens!

Bat Houses?

General Electric's first product was the "Edison Electric Light Bulb." They manufacture so many products now.

Our first product was the mason bee and easytear tubes. The Crown Bees team thought hard about stepping beyond gentle bees to other products. Our resolution was that yes, we should help people add habitats and other products, and that whatever we added had to be high quality, sustainable and its design based on proven facts and data.

Our first step outside Mason, leafcutter and bumble bees will likely be a bat house.

Why bats?

They are important night time pollinators and awesome mosquito eaters. They help farmers with pests on crops, are beneficial for medical research and seed propagation, and have many other favorable characteristics. They are also having a tough time with loss of habitat across the country.

We analyzed about 12 "bat sites" paying extra attention to

www.batconservation.org, the nation's nonprofit group that leads efforts to help people overcome their fear of bats and to learn how to best provide shelter for them.

We found some great bat houses online and some not so great, but cheap houses. We're comfortable that what we produce will be correct for the bats, high quality, and fair priced. Bat houses can be certified (who knew?), which we will obtain from the bat conservation team.

On our "[Learn](#)" page, you'll now find a tab now for bats. Take a few minutes and learn about these nifty winged creatures.

We hope to very soon have a high quality bat house available for sale on our website. Now is the time to buy them as the houses need to be placed outdoors and allowed to sit over the winter neutralizing all smells. We have several prototypes that we're working on to ensure we have the right dimensions, appropriate width and ventilation for the inner chambers.

Over time we will begin to think through specific bird and butterfly houses. We won't be initially focused on "cute", but rather functional, well built, sustainable houses.

Be watching our website over the next few weeks for more "bat news".



Mason Bee events across the country

It is great to see increased "Pollination" events. I'm very thankful for their attention.

In the Northeast:

- Sept 22, a Pollinator Conference will be held at the Cornell Cooperative Extension office for New York's Albany County in Voorheesville. Directions: <http://albany.cce.cornell.edu/map>. [Click here](#) to learn more and register.



- Sept 20, Laurie Klahre, from the Blossom Meadow store on Long Island, will be giving a TED Talk in New York City on mason bees. Sweet! We wish Laurie confidence and smooth delivery!!!



In Texas

- Sept 19-20, Pollinator PowWow. We were asked to speak, but don't have the bandwidth just yet to attend events such as this. The agenda looks to be wonderful. [Learn more.](#)



In Oregon

- Oct 1-3, 2015 6th International Orchard Bee Association Meeting and Pollinator Symposium in Hood River. Lots of science and networking with mason bee peers. We absolutely support OBA and all it is doing to change and accelerate mason bee usage in orchards. Anyone is welcome to attend. [See more and to register](#) (you can attend the early commercial-use discussions and science portion, or just the Saturday which is designed more for the general mason bee raiser.)



In Washington State

- Sept 19, Crown Bees will once again host an [open house](#) to harvest your cocoons in our headquarters in Woodinville from 10am-3pm. Learn how to open your nesting holes, how to clean and store your bees! While this event is free, please register so that we know how many cookies to bake. Feel free to forward this link (<http://crownbees.com/harvestparty>) to your friends.
- Sept 21-23, Crown Bees is harvesting cocoons from our fields. We will have volunteers from our mason bee producers graciously assist us. Either email or call us to reserve a spot. We have morning and afternoon sessions available.



Anywhere in US/Canada

- Gather some friends together and have your own cocoon harvest party. Speak with a local nursery to host the event. We have thoughts on how best to do this [here](#). Once BeeWithMe is up and running, we will coordinate national parties there!