TALKING POINTS FOR CHILDREN

TEACH NATIVE BEES TO ALL AGES

Talking with school children about our native hole-nesting bees is easy and fun. It's the perfect way to influence them to view our world's bees differently.

Simply bring some empty cocoons, nesting materials, and even your bee house for show and tell. If you have some emerged bees, bring them in a clear container and use the classroom's document viewer as a video camera. The teacher can also help pass the container around the room as you speak so that each child can see the bees up close (make sure that an adult helps monitor the live bees to help keep the box closed).

All you have to do is give a quick introduction to the bees and offer to answer the children's questions. Remember, it's okay to be honest if you don't have all the answers!

Here are ideas and facts that you can teach the children and you don't have to cover each point. Have fun!

1. Social vs solitary bees

- 99% of the world's 21,000+ species of bees DO NOT live in a social structure, so they do not make honey & wax or live in hives or colonies
- Instead, most of the world's bees are solitary, which means that each female is a fertile queen
- Bees come in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes and they all have value as pollinators
- Mason and leafcutter bees are solitary bees that nest in pre-made holes

2. Excellent pollinators

- Many plants that make fruit have heavy pollen that can't be carried by the wind, instead they need the help of an animal pollinator like a bee
- Mason and leafcutter bees carry pollen on special hairs (called scopa) on their abdomens (bellies)
- Dry, loose pollen carried by mason and leafcutter bees falls off at every flower visited
- Mason bees belly-flop as they land on flowers and they are messy pollen spreaders

3. Why they are gentle & easy to raise

- Every female solitary bee has to do all the work to take care of her young
- Each female solitary bee is too busy to spend time defending her nest, solitary bees are gentle and less aggressive than social bees
- We can easily build homes for hole-nesting bees (we can't easily build homes for ground-nesting bees)
- Mason and leafcutter bees hibernate over the winter in cocoons, which makes them easy to handle and move

4. How they help us grow more food

- Mason bees are active in early spring and they pollinate fruit & nut trees and berry bushes
- Leafcutter bees are active throughout the summer and they pollinate vegetables and summer fruits
- Adding a new or different bee species can help a farmer grow 24% more food!
- A properly pollinated flower grows fruit that is larger, rounder, and healthier

5. How they build nests in holes

- Each female bees picks a nesting hole and claims it as her own with scent
- Starting at the back, she builds a nesting chamber and fills it with a mix of pollen and nectar called a pollen loaf
- She lays one egg per chamber and seals it to protect it
- Mason bees use mud to build chamber walls
- Leafcutter bees use leaves to build protective leafy cocoons for each egg
- Mason bees hibernate as adults in their waterproof cocoons
- Leafcutter bees hibernate as eggs or larvae in their leafy cocoons

6. Telling the difference between bees

- Mason bees are dark blue with black hair, leafcutter bees are dark yellow/orange and kind of look like honey bees
- Male mason bees are smaller with longer antennae and have white patches of hair on their heads
- Female mason bees are larger and they have big jaws for carrying mud
- Male leafcutter bees have bright green eyes and they are overall lighter in color
- Female leafcutter bees are overall darker with black or dark green eyes and large jaws for cutting and carrying leaves