

TIPS FOR HEALTHY MASON BEES

- Do not use pesticides on your property. Bees are sensitive to them and may become ill or die if exposed.
- Mason bees use mud to seal off the chambers of their nesting tubes (this is why they are called mason bees). Be sure your bees have easy access to exposed soil or a container of mud.
- Ensure your bees have enough pollen to eat by planting bee-attracting, native flowering plants. Mason bees especially like the flowers of fruit trees.



Mason bee looking out of its nesting tube.

MASON BEES ARE NOT CARPENTER BEES!

- Like mason bees, carpenter bees are solitary (non-hive-dwelling) bees.
- Unlike carpenter bees, mason bees cannot chew through wood. In the wild mason bees look for tunnels in dead trees that have already been dug out by other insects, such as beetles.
- Carpenter bees will not be attracted to nesting boxes for mason bees.

TIPS ON BUYING MASON BEES

- If you build a mason bee house, wild mason bees are likely to move in. However, if there are few mason bees in your area or you want to be sure you have a high bee population, you will have to buy your own bees.
- Timing matters when buying bees. Mason bees are typically sold in cocoon form in fall or winter and are meant to be set out in nesting boxes in the spring.
- There are multiple species of mason bees in North America. A reputable dealer will only sell you mason bees appropriate to your particular location.

PREDATOR DETERRENCE

- Deter squirrels and woodpeckers by attaching chicken wire over the front of your mason bee box.
- Mount boxes 4-5 ft. off the ground.

SOURCES

- www.xerces.org/ (The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation).
- www.crownbees.com
- beediverse.com
- www.inpaws.org/ (The Indiana Native Plant & Wildflower Society).
- www.bloomington.in.gov/environment
- www.beyondpesticides.org
- Texas A&M University - Agricultural Communications (2006, March 14). Native Bees Could Fill Pollinator Hole Left By Honeybees.
- snohomish.wsu.edu/mg/ombblock/paper%20line%20rs%20that%20work.pdf

CREATING HABITAT FOR NATIVE POLLINATORS:

MASON BEES



Photo credit: The Nature Conservancy

MASON BEES are docile pollinating insects native to the United States.

Creating nesting sites for mason bees is an easy and enjoyable way to promote pollination in your garden or yard.



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

MASON BEES...

- ...are far more efficient as pollinators than honeybees. This is partially because honeybees favor nectar gathering over pollen-gathering but mason bees favor gathering pollen.
- ...are not aggressive. Male mason bees have no stingers. Stings from female bees are rare and cause only mild discomfort. Their sting feels like a mosquito bite rather than a sting from a honeybee or wasp.
- ...do not produce honey but do provide valuable pollinating services.
- ...are solitary. Each bee feeds itself and creates its own nest. With mason bees there is no minimum population needed for bees to be healthy, unlike with hive-dwelling honeybees.
- ...take less money, space, and time to raise than honeybees. As long as you have a south-facing wall, fence, or tree, you can raise mason bees.
- ...unlike honeybees, are native to the United States. By supporting mason bees, you are supporting local biodiversity.
- ...have an active lifespan of 6-8 weeks. Eggs laid by an adult mason bee during the active season in spring/summer will hatch, feed, form cocoons, and overwinter inside their cocoon before emerging as adults next spring.
- ...are less susceptible to many diseases than honeybees, including Varroa mites.

MASON BEE BOX STYLES



- Bamboo or reed nesting tubes held together in a frame.



- Drilled wooden block lined with tubes. Replacing the tubes each year helps prevent the buildup of disease.



- Commercial pull-apart trays in wooden frame. Allows for easy cleaning.

BEE BOX TIPS

- Mason bees like nesting tunnels that are 5/16" wide and 5 – 6" deep.
- Attach an overhanging roof to bee boxes to repel rain and wind.
- Be sure nesting holes are clean and straight with smooth entrances.
- Plastic materials (like drinking straws) are too slippery for bees to use as nesting tubes.
- Avoid using treated wood or cedar.

TIMING

- Set out new or cleaned bee houses in early spring (mid to late March) before mason bee nesting begins.
- Each fall around October, gently remove your bee cocoons from their nesting tubes, clean the nest box, and store the cocoons in a cool, dry place such as an unheated shed or garage until spring.

LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

- Mason bees need full sun, especially in the morning! Cold bees cannot fly. Attach boxes to the south side of a building, fence post, or tree.
- Mount boxes securely. Larval bees lack the strength to crawl back onto the food balls provided to them by their mother if dislodged.
- Mount the box so that it tilts downward slightly to avoid moisture and mold in the nesting tubes.