

CARE OF DORMANT MASON BEES

Upon receiving dormant cocoons, remember that you are dealing with living, climate sensitive creatures. Unwrap the shipping material and place the mason bee container in a cool, dark place to keep them dormant- a garage, unheated basement, or refrigerator. They prefer temperatures around 39°F with humidity levels between 60-70%. If it is the season for them to break dormancy (are your pears and cherries in bloom?), remove the protective seal from container and place/attach the container to their new homes outside. As we get into mid-February, they can emerge from dormancy in as little as 3-4 hours at room temperature. Generally three-four days in a row above 55° F will trigger males to start emerging outdoors.

TUBE FOLDING

The empty tubes that we provide arrive unfolded. A roll of scotch tape and rubber bands are all that you will need to get them ready to put out/ Mark out the length of the tube, and its center point (6 inches in from either end) on your work surface. With the marks as a guide, use a pair of needle nose pliers or your fingers at the center 6" mark, and fold the tube in half so its ends are even with each other. Now add enough scotch tape to hold it together, and keep folding tubes until you have enough.

Twenty-seven 12-inch tubes (one bundle), once folded, will fill one side of a 3" pvc pipe (you will need 2 bundles to fill both sides of a 3" pvc house).

For people just getting started we recommend one or two bundles of empty tubes and 1-2 boxes of cocoons. This ratio of empty tubes to dormant bees ensures that you have enough space for 2-3 years of nesting space as your bees multiply.

PLACING YOUR NESTS

Be sure to place your mason bee homes out of reach of any little hands, curious pets, or routine tasks (like mowing) that might jostle the nests between March and November of each year.

Hang your house so that the tubes/holes are horizontal.

mason bees like morning sun while they are actively flying (March through early June), summer shade while the young larva are hatching in the tubes, and shelter from wind and rain. It's hard to get all the conditions just perfect, but try. Our favorite spots for setting houses are the south or east sides of buildings, close under the eaves, or attached 5-8 feet up in deciduous trees (on a solid branch). If you are using an existing home (wood block, routed out trays, or empty tubes in pvc) attach the mason bee cocoon container below or alongside their new home.

Often, jays, squirrels, and woodpeckers can disrupt nests in summer and fall, searching out for tasty developing bees; you can protect your houses with a covering of hardware cloth. The bees will be able to get through, and the critters are kept out.

HARVESTING COCOONS

There are many different housing options for your mason bee colonies. In order to prevent disease and pest infestations, we recommend harvesting and sterilizing your cocoons every year. Wooden blocks with drilled holes tend to be problematic as you are unable to harvest cocoons, unless you line the holes with a paper straw you will need to replace your homes on a yearly basis. The type of housing you provide will determine how best to harvest your cocoons. The tray method seems to be the easiest option for harvesting cocoons. Stacked trays can be taken apart and the cocoons are easily removed by scraping the holes with a flat head screw driver. Cardboard or paper tubes must be carefully sliced open or peeled apart to reveal the cocoons.

STEPS TO HARVESTING COCOONS- October-November

1. Sift loose cocoons in a small holed colander to remove frass (the larva's excrement), mud particles, and pollen.
2. Place cleaned cocoons in a large bowl.
3. Fill the bowl with a 5% bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach to 8 cups of cool water).
4. Swirl the cocoons around to knock off remaining debris.
5. After 1-2 minutes rinse the cocoons with cool water.
6. Carefully examine the cocoons and discard those that look damaged or diseased.
7. Be on the lookout for pollen mite frass, parasitic wasp holes, chalk brood, and dermestid beetle larvae.
8. Place cocoons on a screen or towel and allow them to thoroughly dry.
9. Place cleaned/sterilized cocoons in a container, with air holes, in a cool, dark environment. Approximately 39° with 60-70% humidity is ideal.

Questions? Comments?

Want to help grow out mason bees for us?

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