

MASON BEES



Mason bees or “Osmia bees” are so named because of how they make their homes. Mason bees nest in wood holes and surround their cocoons with mud and clay. They are also called “Orchard bees, and “Blue Orchard Mason bees” because they are metallic blue and very effective pollinators of early blossoms, such as our apple, pear, cherry and other fruit trees that flower in springtime. We can encourage mason bees to live in our neighbourhoods by building housing for them to nest during the year.

[Check out this video to learn more about mason bees!](#)

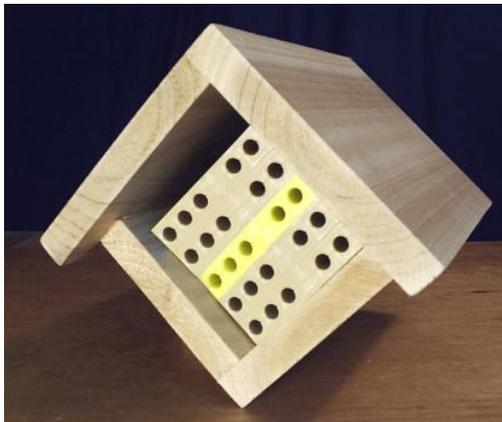
BENEFITS OF MASON BEES:

- Native species to North America. On the west coast we have the species *Osmia lignaria*
- Effective pollinator of many crops, including early flowers. Mason Bees will fly in lower temperatures than honeybees, and can pollinate 10x more efficiently.
- Easy to manage

MANAGING MASON BEES:

Mason bees will find suitable homes themselves if you put houses outside, however if you don’t want to wait you can purchase cocoons from gardening stores and other retailers.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR MASON BEE HOUSE:



There are many levels of mason bee care you can provide, this guide offers detail on caring for cocoons over winter. Alternatively you can take the “leave it to nature” approach by leaving cocoons overwinter in your mason bee house – this is also an appropriate management strategy for small homes. However mite build up is a concern when providing a living space for mason bees. If you notice low numbers of returning bees that hatch the following year (less than half of the previous year’s numbers) take precaution by cleaning your home and collecting cocoons in the fall. You don’t want to do more harm than good by spreading disease and mite

infestation in the natural populations.

Mason Bee houses should be placed facing South or East as it is important to warm their home at first light in the morning as bees depend on the temperature to be active. Nests should be well placed away

from moisture or rain, and 4-10 feet off the ground. If possible, plant early blooming flowers near the nest box. Leave bare patches of soil and clay near nest boxes to provide nesting material.

SPRING: Place cocoons just above your mason house (not in the holes) in a dry, protected spot in March, and after the last frost. Mason bees will soon emerge from cocoons with males coming first, then females. Watch to see them hatch!

EARLY SUMMER: Enjoy your pollinator friends hard at work. Female mason bees build nests in the wood holes. She lays cocoons and collects nectar and pollen to line around the cocoons as a food source when the babies hatch. She then seals up each cocoon with mud and clay as a protective barrier against weather and predators.

MID SUMMER: Mother mason bee's work is done and she dies to leave her next offspring to do the same next spring.

FALL: In September take down your mason bee house and dismantle the tubes of wood carefully. THIS IS MESSY, so do it outside or lay down newspaper. Empty each nest cell and place cocoons in a sieve. Rinse sieve under water until it runs clean, then place cocoons in a 5% bleach solution for about 10 minutes. Cocoons are amazing little hibernation hatches that repel water and the bleach wont hurt the larvae developing inside, but it will kill any fungus or bacteria left on the outside of the cocoon. Leave them to dry and place in a sealed container at lower than 5 degrees Celsius (the fridge works fine but check your settings). Clean the bee house tubes using soap and water and also leave in 5% bleach for 10 minutes before you reassemble.

Check out the David Suzuki Foundations blog on [cleaning mason bee cocoons](#)

**** PLEASE BE CAREFUL WHEN PURCHASING COCOONS**, we want to manage bees responsibly and it **IS NOT** suitable to buy cocoons that are shipped from the east coast - some retailers offer east coast varieties of Mason bees for sale, but they are not native to Vancouver. We **HIGHLY ENCOURAGE** you to ask your retailer the source of cocoons before purchase. ******



The Environmental Youth Alliance sells mason bee houses. Visit EYA's online store for orders at: www.eya.ca