

Mason Beekeeping Tips



1. Don't be afraid.

Male orchard bees do not have stingers—and since they have no queen to protect and all of the females are fertile—they're not aggressive. It is still possible to get stung by a female bee, though the sting is similar to a mosquito bite.

2. Pollen is important.

If there isn't enough pollen in your yard, mason bees will move on to other areas.

3. Keeping nesting boxes.

South-facing garage, house, or garden shed walls are ideal areas for establishing your nesting boxes. You will also want to make sure that food is available within about 300 feet of the nest—this is as far as the bees will travel.

4. Mud is a must.

Since female mason bees need mud for their eggs, it is important to have open ground (without grass or bark) nearby.

5. Choosing nesting materials.

Pull-apart wooden blocks, cardboard with paper lining, drilled blocks, and homemade paper tubes can all work well for nesting. Drilled blocks must be made new each year—they can get infected with microscopic pests and cannot be cleaned. Nesting supplies can be purchased from www.fatdogfarms.com.

6. Observing your bees.

Mason bees are fascinating to watch—they can be just as educational for kids as they are eco-friendly. Here are some fun things that kids can observe about their small and industrious new friends:

- Pollen on the female as she returns to the nest (a clean belly means that she has mud to take home).
- When the food supply is complete, the female will come out of her nest, turn around, and then back herself in to lay another egg.
- If a mason bee accidentally goes into another bee's hole, the intruder will quickly back out and find the correct nest. Their individual pheromones help them identify their own hole.
- When the female is adding her final mud plug, she'll go around and around the hole's opening as she works to close the egg chamber.
- Using a flashlight at night or in the early morning, you can see the bees at rest in the front of their holes, with their eyes looking out at you.
- Watch your mason bees as they work on blossoms in the yard, and notice which plants they like to frequent.
- Look for the antennae that distinguish them from flies.
- Learn to distinguish the males from the females by spotting the white hair on the males' heads.

7. Be on guard for predators.

Robins, crows, starlings, and woodpeckers prey on adult mason bees as they emerge from their nests. The bees are especially vulnerable in the early morning when they bask in the sun to warm up enough to fly, or while they're out in the open gathering mud.

For the birds, these sweet little bees are like candy — especially if they find a nesting block that happens to be filled with a lot of bees. The best way to avoid predators is to store the nest in the garage or shed at the end of the active period.

8. Setting your materials out in the spring.

Nesting units need to be protected from rain and wind. Keeping them mounted with the cavities tilting slightly down will prevent rainwater from entering and creating harmful mold. Securing the nesting units will also prevent movement that could dislodge eggs or young larvae. The space may only be a mere 3/8 of an inch, but the babies are too weak to crawl back in.

Nesting materials need to be set out before nesting begins (mid to late March), since the females lay the most eggs in the beginning of the season.

Placing the nesting units on the south-facing side of the building is key—the bees need to warm up to 80 degrees for their wings to function. Mason bees' black bodies can soak up rays even when it's only 58-64 degrees outside, making exposure to direct sunlight very important.

9. Harvesting your bees.

Just like caring for a fish tank, the bees and nesting materials need to be cleaned each fall, or you could risk losing your colony. Pests and mites can be greatly reduced by opening and sanitizing the nesting material each October. For information on how to clean harvest your bees, please refer to the Harvesting Your Mason Bee document produced by Fat Dog Farms or visit www.fatdogfarms.com.

10. Encourage organic practices.

Add holes with different drill bits to dead trees for various flying pollinators; set aside a bare patch of ground for ground nesting pollinators; and avoid using chemicals and pesticides.

To purchase live mason bees, mason bee supplies, or for more information, please visit www.fatdogfarms.com.
For questions, please contact us at fatdogfarms@yahoo.com.



