

Harvesting Your Mason Bees

(November – January)



Just like caring for a fish tank, the bees and nesting materials need to be cleaned or you could risk losing your colony. Pests and mites can be greatly reduced by opening and sanitizing the nesting material in winter.

Cleaning mason bee cocoons is necessary to remove pollen mites, which can threaten a colony when present in high numbers. The pollen mites appear as golden or orange granules surrounding the cocoon or occupying an entire chamber. These will affect subsequent generations by attaching to the emerging bees.

We normally will clean our bees and nesting material in December and sometimes as late as January. We have provided our cleaning technique with a step by step process below:

Cleaning Process for Guard Tubes and Liners

1. Remove all liners from their guard tubes and inspect for any little holes made by parasitic wasps (image 1). The cocoons inside the damaged tubes will need to be carefully inspected for any cocoons that may have been eaten by the wasp (image 2).



(Image 1)



(Image 2)

2. Start unwrapping your tubes and carefully extract each cocoon. You may need to use scissors to assist with unwrapping them. You will find cocoons with a little bee droppings (small back feces), mud, and pollen in between each cell. Pollen will appear like a waxy substance and mites will be fluffy. The image below shows a cell filled with mites. The orange is mostly droppings. The mites are numerous but they are somewhat clear colored. You will not find a bee larva in the cells with numerous mites. The mites destroyed the bee egg. While the bees have few defenses against them, we can save them from the agony of defeat. Discard any suspicious cocoons and place the viable cocoons in a container to prepare for the washing process.



Continued on reverse.

Cleaning Process for Stackable Trays

Disassemble the bee condo by separating each layer. Using a flathead screwdriver, gently scrape out the channels of each layer of your condo. Separate the viable cocoons from the debris and now you are ready to clean your new colony!

Washing Process

The next step involves washing the mason bee cocoons in a bleach and water solution. Don't worry, the cocoons are tough and will not be hurt. This does not kill the mites, but washes them off. The mites are extremely hard to kill, even with bleach.

- Fill a medium sized bowl with cool water.
- Place the cocoons in the water for about 2-3 minutes stirring them around.
- Remove the cocoons and rinse them thoroughly with fresh water.
- Lightly pad them dry with a paper towel. Do not store them in the refrigerator wet.
- Do not use hot water or it may cause the larva to awake and think it is time to emerge. Use cold water and store in the refrigerator before they heat up to room temperature.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: After Cleaning Cocoons

After cleaning the mason bee cocoons and they are **completely** dry, put the clean cocoons in a **breathable** sealed container and place them in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Place a **damp** paper towel in the container near the cocoons to provide humidity. **Do not place the cocoons directly on top of the wet towel.** Storing them in the refrigerator is the best method because you can keep them in hibernation until you are ready for them in the spring.

An important caution if storing cocoons in a non-heated garage during the winter:

A second option is to place the mason bee cocoons in a non-heated garage or shop building. If you experience several days of unseasonably warm weather, the heat may warm the cocoons enough to trigger an emergence. If that happens, but is followed by freezing weather, or if you have no blossoms yet, you will lose your bees. For this reason, it is better to keep them in a controlled environment.

For more information, or to purchase live mason bees and/or mason bee supplies, please visit www.fatdogfarms.com.

For questions, please contact us at fatdogfarms@yahoo.com.

