

Native Bee House

Honey bees were imported into the US by European settlers to pollinate the crops and to provide honey for food. However, there were many species of native bees in North America prior to the arrival of Europeans. Unlike honeybees, these insects tend to be solitary, not living in hives or colonies. While they don't produce honey, native bees have the ability to pollinate some flowers that honeybees are unable to reach. Furthermore, native bees may pollinate up to 100 times as many flowers as honeybees. With honeybee populations rapidly declining, many gardeners are looking to native bees to reclaim their role as pollinators in the ecosystem. With over 75% of the fruits, nuts and vegetables grown in the US depending on pollination by bees, the importance of native bees in agriculture can only increase.

Mason or Blue Orchard Bees

This house is designed to attract Mason Bees (AKA Blue Orchard Bees) as well as Leafcutter Bees. You do not need to bring these bees into your garden, they are already there. Properly located near your garden, female bees will fill the holes in your nest box with eggs that will increase the pollinators for your plants. Unlike Carpenter Bees, Mason and Leafcutter bees will not drill holes in wood but will occupy existing holes. Female bees will place 5 to 10 eggs in each hole separated by a mud wall. In a season, a female may use 1 to 3 holes for nesting.



Placing your Mason Bee House



Your Mason Bee house should be located near your garden although the bees can fly for over a mile to gather pollen. The nest can be mounted on a post or tree about 4 feet from the ground in a location that receives some sunlight. In spring, female bees in the area will place eggs with pollen in the holes where the developing young bees will emerge the following spring. The females from these young bees will likely return to your nest box to lay eggs. The number of bees nesting in your box should increase over time as the native been population increases.

Although you may leave your Mason Bee house outside all winter, many gardeners find they can improve the hatching rate if the winter is especially cold by bringing their Mason Bee house into an unheated garage or outbuilding.

Care of your Mason Bee house

Your Mason Bee nest box should need very little care. The bees will nest in the box year after year. If you desire, you can remove the back of the nest box with the four Philips screws at the end of the gardening season and clean the unused holes. However, this really isn't necessary. Some gardeners make a tube of parchment paper to line the holes and making the nest easier to clean. The bees, however, are fine with cleaning the holes in your nest box themselves as needed. Do not paint or stain the nest since the odor may repel the bees.

