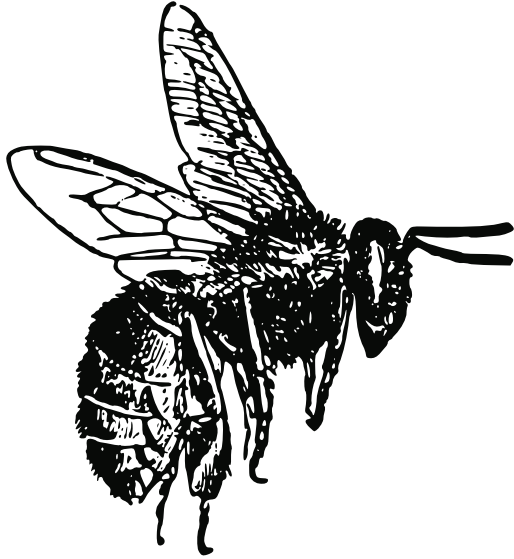




West Coast Seeds

Mason Bee Cocoons



Mason bees are “solitary bees,” meaning that unlike honey bees, they do not form a massive colony. Rather, these hard-working native pollinators emerge from their cocoons in the spring, and begin the process of nesting in specialized tubes. In each tube, a female mason bee might lay as many as six or seven eggs, and she’ll provide a food source (a big ball of pollen and nectar) for each egg. The eggs and food stores are each separated into their own cell, and then the tube itself is capped with a little bit of clay—hence the name “mason” bee.

Thank you for ordering mason bees from West Coast Seeds. We hope that this will be the beginning of a happy and beneficial relationship.

Good luck and happy beekeeping!

Understanding the Mason Bee Life Cycle

Mason bees are considered “early” bees because they are active as pollinators earlier in the season than many other species of bees. They may emerge from their cocoons as early as the beginning of March, when the first flowers are appearing. This is the time when Forsythia blooms, and the first dandelions can be seen.

The male bees emerge first, and begin foraging for food in the form of pollen and nectar from flowers. Gradually, the female bees emerge and right away they begin to look for suitable nesting spots. They prefer a nesting tube of a specific depth, with an opening of a specific diameter. Too big, or too small, will not do. Once the nesting site is chosen, the female bee releases a pheromone to attract male bees, they mate, and she begins to lay eggs and gather food supplies for her offspring. By the end of June, her work is done, the nest is full, and the adult bees die off.



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What to do when you get home with your bees:

Do not open your container (s) of bees until they are ready to be released. In the meanwhile, please store the bee box in the refrigerator where they will not be disturbed or crushed. You can keep your bees from dehydrating in the refrigerator by storing them in their box in an airtight container with a damp paper towel. Do not allow the bees to come in direct contact with the paper towel. They can be kept this way for the winter.

Prepare the nesting site by mid-February– whether you are using bee cottages, nesting tubes, or other forms. Choose a sunny location that receives morning light. Position the nest on a broad surface such as the side of a house, garage or fence, as long as it faces east or south and is in full sun. Placing it at eye level will give you the chance to view their activity easily.

In early March consider bringing out your bees. If using your bees to pollinate an orchard wait until about 25% of the trees are in bloom. Otherwise, check for other flowering plants in and around your garden. The bees will be visiting as many as 17 blooms a minute within a 100 meter radius.

The ideal conditions for releasing the bees are on a warm windless day with lots of spring flowering plants in bloom in your garden. It is good idea not to wait too long to put your bees out. Even if conditions are cold and unfriendly the bees will emerge when they are ready.

Your box of bees (with the bees still inside) can now be placed outside near or next to the nest. It's important to keep the box out of the rain and not in direct sunlight. You can make an exit hatch for the bees by opening one end of the box.

In as little as half an hour the male bees will be warm enough to begin emergence. They do not return to the box or enter the nest. They may wander from your garden but not far. Over the next few days or even weeks the females come out of diapause and begin nesting. This is a natural process that cannot be sped up. Please trust the bees' judgment on the right conditions in which to emerge.

With the right circumstances and a little luck, the females should mate and set up house in your nesting site.

Releasing Mason Bees

With the approach of warmer spring weather and the appearance of flowers on trees and in your garden, you will have come full circle with your mason bees. In March, on a warm, relatively calm day, mount your clean mason bee nesting box on a south or east-facing wall where it will receive morning sunshine. The cocoons can be taken out of the refrigerator and placed on or near the nesting box. Remember that the males will emerge first and wander off on their own. It's the female bees that we hope will emerge, discover the ideal nesting site in your box, and set up house. It may take a matter of hours for the bees to emerge, or up to several days.

Key Mason Bee Dates

March to April - release cocoons

End of June to early July - take nesting box indoors

Late September to November - wash and store cocoons

There are early and late flyers, so please be patient.

The Mason Bee-Keeper's Job

From the moment they hatch from eggs to the day they emerge from their cocoons, mason bees are fairly helpless and vulnerable to a number of foes. Birds may raid the nesting site, and eat the nutritious young in their cocoons. Pollen mites, gathered inadvertently by the adult female, may be present in the nesting tube and compete with the young bees for pollen. And parasitic wasps may insert their own eggs into the bodies of the young bees.

As mason bee keepers, we can take a couple of simple steps to give the young bees a better chance of making through to the next season. The first step is to bring the mason bee house indoors in July, once the nesting phase is complete. It can be stored any place out of harm's way, with the entry holes facing up (ie, a mason bee house resting on its "back"). This ensures that the larval bees will be in contact with their food supply. The next step we can take is to wash the cocoons and store them safely over winter.

For more information on mason bees and how to care for them, please visit us online at www.westcoastseeds.com

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