

Mason bees require nesting cavities like tubes or reeds, mud to partition their brood chambers and spring flowering plants. Native bees prefer native flowering plants and mason bees are no exception, although they are most active in early spring when fruit orchards and dandelions first bloom. The most common native mason bee in Clark County raised in backyards for pollination is *Osmia lignaira* (Family Megachilidae) which tends to be small to medium sized (8-15 mm) and metallic blue, black or green in color with approximately equally proportioned head, abdomen and thorax. Males emerge first in the spring and tend to be smaller and have longer antenna while the females are larger and are more robust. The underside of their bodies are covered in hairs (scopa) used to carry pollen. Mason bees use their large mandibles to collect mud and provisions to feed their larva.

## Did you know?

Research shows that most mason bees only travel 300 to 500 feet from their nesting house to forage. That means if there aren't early spring flowers within 500 feet of your bee house, it's unlikely the mason bees will be successful and they are likely to leave or die.



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[www.vancouverbeeproject.org](http://www.vancouverbeeproject.org)

# Mason Bee Stewardship Quick Guide



Compiled by



VANCOUVER BEE PROJECT

# Mason Bee Calendar

## November - February

Store overwintering cocoons, clean bee houses, decide on bee house placement, and monitor cocoons. Obtain new cocoons from a reliable source. Take advantage of native pollinator plant sales for spring planting.

## March/April

Place mason bee cocoons or tubes with bees in your bee house when flowers are blooming and daytime temperatures near 55 degrees. March 15 or so is a good target date for Vancouver. If you store cocoons in the refrigerator you can put cocoons out until approximately April 15 to coincide with fruit tree blooms. After April the bees transferred from the refrigerator to the bee house will still hatch but may have a harder time getting resources.

## May/June

Mason bees will usually stay busy through May but numbers will noticeably dwindle starting in mid-May and are usually done with provisioning cells and the solitary queens have died off by approximately June 1. When bees are done nesting take the tubes or nesting blocks and place them in a paper or fine mesh nylon bag and store in a warm, dry place with outdoor temperatures like a shed or garage - but not someplace that gets too hot.

## July - September

Let summer leafcutter bees and other wild solitary bees reuse the bee houses by putting in new nesting blocks or tubes. Keep an eye out for native plant sales that provide plants for fall planting.

## October

Harvest bee cocoons by cleaning out nesting trays and tubes. Make sure and attend the annual Vancouver Bee Project bee cocoon cleaning event. And don't forget to plant native wildflower seeds for the next year's native wildflower meadow as fall is the best time to plant all native plants!

## Mason Bee Houses and Placement

There are many bee houses available but some are easier to manage than others. Mason bees have many pests that can impact their survival so providing houses that are easy to clean and harvesting cocoons helps us be good bee stewards. We recommend using smaller houses that have cardboard/paper tubes or nesting blocks. These nesting materials are much easier to clean and manage. Wood or plastic houses work well but stay away from plastic nesting materials like straws or plastic nesting blocks as they don't breathe well and have moisture issues.



We recommend placing bee houses east or south-facing in a place that receives morning sunlight. The houses can be shaded in the afternoon. Full sun is not recommended as it could get too hot for the developing bee larva. It's better to have multiple small houses rather than one large house to help manage disease. Houses should be at least 3-4 feet off the ground but higher locations are also fine. We recommend placing the house where you can see and enjoy it daily.



Place houses within 500 feet of a forage source and with access to mud for nesting.

# How You Can Help Pollinators



Plant pollinator friendly plants that are native to Clark County and encourage your neighbors and city leaders to do the same. Make sure plants have overlapping bloom time that supports pollinators from spring through fall.

Recognize existing pollinator habitat and protect it. Advocate for more pollinator habitat.



Reduce/cease the use of pesticides like insecticides, fungicides and herbicides and educate yourself on organic pest control methods.

Provide a water supply (and mud supply for mason bees) that allows the bees to drink without drowning. Shallow dishes or bird baths with rocks work well.



Provide bee houses and protect bee nests (70% of bees nest in bare ground). Be a good steward for native bees and leave the leaves in the fall and provide bare ground and brush piles for bee habitat.

Talk to your friends, family, neighbors and coworkers about pollinators and pollinator friendly practices. Support Vancouver becoming a Bee City USA® affiliate.



[www.vancouverbeeproject.org/bee-city-usa](http://www.vancouverbeeproject.org/bee-city-usa)