

## Mason Bees

### Harvesting Cocoons & Creating a Nesting Space

Mason bees are incredibly efficient pollinators, with a single bee capable of visiting up to 20,000 blossoms per day—equivalent to the work of 60 honeybees! Unlike honeybees, they excel in cooler spring weather, making them a dependable choice for early-season pollination. Known for their gentle nature and tireless work ethic, mason bees boast an impressive 95% pollination success rate, leading to increased fruit yields for apricots, almonds, apples, blueberries, cherries, peaches, pears, plums, raspberries, strawberries, and flowers in the rose family.

To help these valuable pollinators thrive, it's essential to provide a well-suited nesting space and properly harvest their cocoons. This guide will walk you through the necessary steps to support a healthy mason bee population while safeguarding them from predators.

#### How to Create a Mason Bee Nesting Space

Creating a suitable habitat is key to supporting mason bees, promoting healthy reproduction, and maximizing their pollination benefits in your garden.

**Choosing a Mason Bee House:** Select a bee house made of natural wood with removable nesting trays or paper tubes. Place it 4-6 feet off the ground in a sunny, south or southeast-facing location, protected from wind and rain.

**Providing Nesting Materials:** Use removable paper tubes, reeds, or wood trays for easy cleaning. Avoid drilled wooden blocks or bamboo, as they cannot be cleaned and harbor pests.

**Ensuring a Mud Source:** Mason bees require clay-like mud to seal their egg chambers. A small, moist patch of soil near the bee house is ideal.

**Ongoing Care:** Clean and replace nesting materials annually in the fall, typically towards the end of most bee activity when the bees have finished nesting and are preparing for winter hibernation; this is usually around late September or October, depending on your climate. Keep the bee house in a dry location over winter to protect developing bees.

#### How to Harvest Mason Bee Cocoons

Harvesting mason bee cocoons each fall helps protect them from pests, diseases, and harsh weather, ensuring a strong return in the spring.

##### When to Harvest

Harvest cocoons in late September through early November when the larvae have fully developed into bees inside their protective casings.

##### Collect the Nesting Materials

Remove bee tubes, reeds, or wooden trays from your bee house and store them in a dry, cool place before cleaning.

##### Open the Nesting Materials

Carefully open the tubes or trays to access the cocoons. For paper tubes, gently peel them apart. Stackable wood trays can be separated layer by layer. Avoid using force to prevent damage.

##### Remove Debris and Pests

Gently brush off debris and inspect cocoons for mites or parasites. Discard any discolored, damaged, or deformed cocoons. If needed, rinse cocoons in room-temperature water to remove dirt and mites.

##### Dry the Cocoons

Lay cocoons on a dry towel and allow them to air-dry for 24 hours in a cool, well-ventilated space. Ensure they are fully dry to prevent mold growth.

##### Store for Winter

Store dry cocoons in a breathable container, like a ventilated plastic box or a paper bag, and place them in your refrigerator at 35-40°F (1-4°C). Keep them away from fruits, as ethylene gas can harm the developing bees.

##### Release in Spring

When temperatures consistently reach 50°F (10°C) outside in early spring, place the cocoons 4-6 feet off the ground near their nesting site and allow them to emerge naturally to begin pollinating.

Annuals

Alyssum  
Calendula  
Cornflower  
Cosmos  
Forget Me Nots  
Lantana  
*Papaver* - Poppies  
Petunia  
Primrose  
Salvia  
Sunflowers  
Zinnias

Berries / Farm Crops

Blackberries  
Blueberries  
Cranberries  
Huckleberries  
Raspberries  
Strawberries

Bulbs / Perennials

*Achillea* - Yarrow  
*Alchemilla* - Lady’s Mantle  
*Arabis* - Rockcress  
*Aruncus dioicus* - Goat’s Beard  
*Camassia* - Wild Hyacinth  
Crocus  
*Echinacea* - Coneflower  
*Erigeron* - Fleabane  
*Erythronium* - Fawn Lillies  
*Geranium* - Wild Geranium  
*Helianthus* - Woodland Sunflower  
*Helleborus* - Hellebore  
*Hieracium* - Indian Hemp  
*Iberis* - Candytuft  
*Lavendula* - Lavender  
*Lupinus* - Lupine  
*Mertensia* - Virginia Blue Bells  
*Monarda* - Bee Balm  
*Muscari* - Grape Hyacinth  
*Narcissus* - Daffodils  
*Nepeta* - Catmint  
*Papaver* - Poppy  
*Penstemon* - Beardtongue  
*Perovskia* - Russian Sage  
*Phlox subulata* - Creeping Phlox  
*Polemonium* - Jacobs Ladder  
*Primula* - Primrose  
*Pulmonaria* - Lungwort  
*Rudbeckia* - Black Eyed Susan  
*Trillium* – Birthroot

Comon Weeds

Chickweed  
Clover  
Dandelion  
*Lamium* - Henbit  
Speedwell  
Wild Mustard

Cover Crops

Alfalfa      Buckwheat  
Canola      Clover  
Turnips

Groundcover

*Actostaphylos* - Kinnickinnick  
*Fragaria* - Wild Strawberry  
*Gaultheria* - Salal  
*Violas labradorica* - Labrador Violet

Shrubs

*Amelanchier* - Serviceberry  
*Aronia* - Chokeberry  
*Azaleas* - Azaleas  
*Ceanothus* - California Lilac  
*Erica / Calluna* - Heather  
*Forsythia* - Forsythia  
*Ilex glabra* - Inkberry  
*Ilex verticillata* - Winterberry  
*Lindera* - Spicebush  
*Oregon Grape* - Mahonia  
*Physocarpus* - Ninebark  
*Pieris* - Lilly of The Valley  
*Potentilla* – Cinquefoil  
*Pyracantha* - Firethorn  
*Ribes sanguineum* - Currant – Flowering  
*Rhododendrons* - Rhododendrons  
*Salix discolor* - Pussy Willow  
*Salix lucida* - Pacific Willow  
*Sambucus* - Elderberry  
*Viburnum dentatum* - Arrowhead  
*Viburnum trilobum* - American Cranberry Bush

Trees

*Acer* - Maple  
*Acer circinatum* - Vine Maple  
*Acer marcophylla* - Big Leaf Maple  
*Cercis* - Redbud  
*Cornus* - Flowering - Dogwood  
*Crataegus* - Hawthorne  
*Filbert* - Hazelnut  
*Malus* - *Fruiting* - Apple Tree  
*Malus* - *Flowering* - Crabapple - Flowering  
*Prunus* - *Fruiting* - Almond - Flowering  
*Prunus* - *Fruiting* - Peach Tree - Fruiting  
*Prunus* - *Fruiting* - Plum Tree - Fruiting  
*Prunus* - *Flowering* - Almond - Flowering  
*Prunus* - *Flowering* - Cherry - Flowering  
*Prunus* - *Flowering* - Plum - Flowering  
*Pyrus* - *Fruiting* - Pear Tree  
*Salix discolor* - Pussy Willow  
*Salix spp.* - Willow  
*Tilia americana* - Basswood/Linden

Herbs

Borage	Chives	Fennel
Hyssop	Lavender	Lemon Balm
Mint	Oregano	Rosemary
Sage	Thyme	