



14th Annual Woods, Water and Wildlife Festival: 'Build a Bee House'

-event planned and information compiled
by MMRG Board member Lorrie Drake

Building a Bee House: Solitary bees are excellent pollinators, but they can struggle to find nesting sites. A home-made nest looks attractive and provides them with a home, as well as ensuring bumper harvests. Solitary bees are not aggressive and they rarely sting.

When to Start: Summer

At Its Best: Autumn to winter

Time to Complete: 30 minutes

Materials Needed:

- clippers
- bamboo canes or tubes
- modeling clay
- string
- small terra-cotta or plastic pot
- insulating material (straw, moss, yarn)



1. Cut Lengths of Bamboo

Use sharp clippers to cut short lengths of bamboo canes or tubes that will fit into your pot. The natural variation in diameter will attract different bee species.

2. Push Them Into a Pot

Fill the base of a plant pot with modeling clay 1/2" deep and push the cut bamboo canes firmly into it. Continue doing this until the pot is packed tightly. Push straw, moss or other insulating material into the spaces between the tubes.

3. Hang Your Bee House

Tie string firmly around the pot and suspend it from a hook or attach it to a wall. Choose a sheltered, sunny site, and angle the open end of the pot downward so that the bamboo canes do not fill up with water when it rains. DO NOT move bee houses after they are in place until at least November.

The bee house must be positioned in full sun, facing southeast or south, at least 3 feet off the ground, with no vegetation in front of it that obscures the entrances to the tunnels. Solitary bees rely on the sun's heat to warm them up in the morning, so they need a sunny site.

A bee house must be firmly fixed so that it does not swing or sway in the wind, so you should not hang it from a branch.

DO NOT spray insecticides on or around bee houses.

4. Provide Flower Food

To make life even better for your resident bees, position the nest close to nectar-rich flowers. They will then have only a short distance to travel for food, which will be a great help to them in spring.

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5. Keep the Bee House Dry in Winter

If your bee house has a good overhanging roof and is completely rainproof you can leave it outside during autumn and winter. If not, you should move the bee house to a cold, dry place during the winter to protect the young bees in the tubes from getting wet. An unheated shed, porch, or garage will do. Move the bee house outside again in March. From April onwards, young bees that have over-wintered in a dormant state inside the tunnels will emerge, and start the cycle over again.

6. What Happens in the Bee House?

Each female bee lays 20 to 30 eggs during her life.

When a bee finds a nest she will collect materials to create the cell for her first egg: a ball of pollen stuck together with nectar for each larvae to eat until it develops into an adult bee.

She places the ball inside the cell and lays an egg on top, leaving space for the larvae to grow into an adult bee. She builds a partition wall and repeats the process until the whole tube is filled, leaving a space at the entrance of the tube empty before closing it off and moving on to another tube.

Females choose whether to lay male or female eggs: since males emerge a couple of weeks before the females she lays all the females at the back and males at the front.

Solitary bees spend their early months hidden in the nest growing. They then spend the winter as a cocoon (or pupa) before emerging the following spring or early summer as adults. Once the adult bees have mated, the female looks for a suitable nest and the cycle repeats itself.

What to look for

The only certain sign of nesting is seeing the ends of the tubes capped with either mud, leaves or fine hairs. The type of capping indicates the type of bee and it's possible you might have more than one type at the same time.

Sources:

BugGuide.Net

Grow Wild. <https://www.growwilduk.com/>

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Special Thanks to Brushy Mountain Bee Farm for providing the mason bee tubes for this event!



www.brushymountainbeefarm.com