

## Mason Bees—*Osmia lignaria*

**Description:** Mason bees are also called orchard bees and are native to north America unlike the honey bees brought from Europe. These native bees have been given the name mason due to the ability to use mud to seal off their egg cells in their nests. Unlike honey bees who depend on hive life to survive and propagate, the mason bees live in individual tube like shelters independent of the mason bees. They will, however, live in close proximity to the mason bee. Mason bees are docile and seldom sting and their sting is said to be less painful.

**Pollination:** One mason bee's ability to pollinate equals eighty honey bees. Mason bees have multiple hairs all over their body and have the habit of sloppily flopping on flowers thus spreading oodles of pollen everywhere. It is reported one mason bee's pollinating ability will produce twelve pounds of cherries versus one half pound for a single honey bee. Fruit trees are a favorite of these bees.

**Setting Up Nests:** In nature mason bees select hollow tubes, old woodpecker holes, and gaps in wooden shingles as their homes. Providing man made shelters for nesting allows the bees to concentrate on pollination and egg making. Suppliers of cardboard tubes and shelters are available national via the internet. The shelters should face east or south to catch the moving sun to help the bees warm. (In Illinois the bees emerge early when the crocus bloom). The shelter should be at least three feet off the ground and stationary. A placement under an overhang to protect from weather is good also. A nearby supply of mud is a plus. No treated wood or plastic straws should be used.

**Early Spring:** Hatched bees emerge in early spring...first the males and then in a few days the females. Their lifespan is six-seven weeks. The bees mate, the females look for a nesting site and the male dies. The female proceeds to lay usually twenty eggs—each egg in an individual cell packed with nectar and pollen and sealed with mud. Females travel usually a distance of no greater than three hundred feet and may visit flowers seventy five times for each egg cell.

**Sources of Information:** [www.beediverse.com](http://www.beediverse.com). 800-794-2144

"All About Mason Bees"

"Mason Bees For the Backyard Gardener", Sherian A. Wright

"The Mason Bees", Christopher O'Toole

"Pollination With Mason Bees", Dr. Margriet Dogterom

"The Orchard Mason Bee", Brian L. Griffin

Utube videos

