



melindamyers.com

Making and Caring for a Bee House

www.melindamyers.com

Honeybees and our native bees are important. They are responsible for pollinating much of the food we eat. These important garden visitors need our help so they can continue to help us.

You may have seen honeybees buzzing in and out of their hives or bumblebees entering and exiting a hole leading to their underground colony. But did you know that most bees are solitary – meaning they do not live in colonies but rather in holes in trees, logs or the ground? They are neighborly and will build their nests next to each other. Invite mason and leaf cutter bees into your garden by providing them with specially designed homes.

Like you, bees need a safe place to live. Growing a garden that provides food, shelter and a place to raise their families is a great way to help them. You can also build a bee house for them to live in right in your own yard. It needs a roof and walls to protect them from the weather and space (holes or tubes) for nesting and raising their young.

1. Tubes for nesting:
 - a. Different sizes will attract different bees
 - i. 1/16-1/2-inch in diameter
 - ii. At least 5-inches and up to 8-inches long
 - iii. One end needs to be open and one end needs to be solid or placed against the nesting structure
 - b. Finding tubes
 - i. Make your own tubes by wrapping printer paper or cooking parchment paper around a pencil and taping it to maintain the shape
 - ii. Purchase paper straws
 - c. Use plants with hollow stems; cutting each stem below the node (ridge)
 1. Check your garden for purple coneflower, lavender hyssop, bee balm or Joe Pye weed
 - ii. Use plants with pithy stems and drill holes (with the help of an adult)
 1. Sumac, elderberry and raspberries are good choice (just want out for thorns)
 - iii. Optional – paint the open outer tip black to help attract bees
2. Zip ties, string or wire to hold the tube bundle together and prevent shifting
3. Glue to secure the tube bundle to the nesting box
4. A nesting structure protects the nesting tubes from rain
 - a. Steel cans, pieces of PVC pipe, plastic totes or buckets, cinder blocks, wood frames or anything else that will keep the tubes dry
5. *Optional*
 - a. *Wire mesh to prevent birds and other animals from eating the bees*
 - b. *Paint for decorating your nesting box*

Constructing the bee house

- Select or make the box to hold the nesting tubes
- Make or buy and gather tubes
 - You will need enough to snugly fill the nesting box or a way to secure them in place with twine, wire, glue or filler materials like the cardboard center of a toilet paper roll
- Fill the nesting box with the nesting tubes
- Make sure the tubes are completely covered by the nesting box
- *Optional: Attach wire mesh to the front of the nesting box to keep out other animals*
- *Optional: Paint or decorate your nesting box*

Placing the bee house in the garden

- Place bee houses with clean tubes out in early spring or as soon as they are built
 - Mason bees complete nesting in mid- to late June
 - Leaf cutter bees complete nesting in July and August
- Secure your bee house to a post, fence or structure to prevent it from blowing in the wind
- Face the open side of the bee house toward the southeast to receive morning sunlight and warmth
- Set it at least 4-5 feet above the ground (6 feet to keep out rodents; 8 feet for bears)
- Make sure there are flowers nearby that bloom in spring and summer
- Make a muddy spot nearby for the bees to use to create a safe space for each individual egg in the nesting tubes

Protecting bees from predators, parasites and cold

Parasites and predators can hurt native bees. Take some steps to keep them safe.

- Ants - keep ants out of the bee house by covering the post, bottom of the nesting box and the area around the edge of the bee house with petroleum jelly or a thin like of sticky spray like Tanglefoot (note: thick layers of sticky sprays can trap birds)
- Earwigs – protect bee eggs and larvae from earwigs by trapping them with wet newspaper rolled up and set along side of the bee house or crumbled paper under a clay pot at the base of the bee house
- Birds – place chicken wire over the front of the bee house to keep out birds, allowing 3-inches between the ends of the tubes and the chicken wire
- Wasps – There are several wasp species that will target native bees. The best way to protect your bee house is to watch for any wasps flying around it. The beekeepclub.com offers several suggestions for dealing with wasps.
- Rodents – Set the bee house at least 6 feet above the ground and cover the box with wire mesh to prevent rodents from chewing through the bee house
- Parasites – Once the bees have capped off the tubes with mud and leaf pieces, place the nesting box in a mesh bag to prevent parasite attacks; store the bee house in a dry location out of the direct sun

End-of-season care

- Place tubes in a ventilated box or plastic bin with a ½” diameter hole in one side and store the tube-filled container in a cold, frost-free location like an unheated garage, shed or barn

Next spring

- Set the overwintering tube-filled container outside in early spring when day temperatures warm to 55 degrees, near the new nesting box with new, clean tubes for that year. The bees will exit and find their way to their new home
- Clean out or compost the used tubes once the bees exit and find their way to their new home; this helps reduce the risk of certain pests and disease

Stay Connected

Visit melindamyers.com,

Join me for Free Webinars live or watch the recordings available at www.melindamyers.com

Free e-newsletter - sign up for a chance to win a seasonal gardening prize

Birds & Blooms, Birds & Blooms Extra Magazines

Midwest Gardener's Handbook 2nd Edition released in 2022

Minnesota & Wisconsin Getting Started Gardener's Guide

Month-by Month Gardening in Minnesota & Wisconsin

Can't Miss Small Space Gardening, Midwest Lawn Guides

Instructor for Great Courses How to Grow DVD series including:

Your Best Garden & Landscape in 6 Lessons,

Container Gardening Tips and Techniques

Make Your Trees and Shrubs Thrive,

Food Gardens for Everyone

Join me on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest & Instagram