

BUILDING A LEAF CUTTER AND MASON BEE HOTELS.

Most commercial insect houses are not deep enough for Leaf-cutter and Mason bees. These two bees are both stingless solitary species, much smaller than honey bees, and are major pollinators of fruit trees. In fact, one of these will do the pollination work of 120 honey bees. They are struggling to find enough suitable habitats to nest in partly because we block up so many holes in houses now to keep us snug and also because their habitats have been fragmented. So during last year's Summer lockdown we built some bee hotels and we had great pleasure in watching the Leaf-cutter bees lay their eggs in them. We were too late for the Mason bees who start can working on their houses in April but are looking forward to their taking up residence this year. The hotels are easy to make and would be a good project for children to help with. You need a deep log or piece of wood as the holes need to be at least 10 cm deep without going right through the log. The Mason bees need a hole of about 8mm width and the Leaf-cutter bees somewhat larger at 10mm. There is a very good YouTube video of how to build a house by Dave Goulson the founder of the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust.

This is the link :

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/WhctKJWJLhwZXIJtBSHDdLSPLcFHHxkdMHmWnQMFvjZtTdzslVWsvpBWCvgjxKPCnpPGPL?projector=1>

Some bee hotels for Mason bees in this video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52Etjme2w40&t=153s>

His YouTube channel has many other really helpful ideas on how to help wildlife in the garden

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbnBys2HI1T26dzO_nbgiw/featured

Both types of bee like to have the hotels in a position where they catch the morning sun. Mason bees lay their eggs in individual chambers which they construct in the holes, leaving a supply of nectar and pollen for the larvae in each chamber and then they seal up the holes with mud which they gather from nearby. The protected larvae grow through the year and emerge the following spring. Leaf-cutter bees are fascinating to watch, they line the hole with pieces of leaf and, as the Mason bees, lay their eggs in chambers inside the hole and then seal the front with another piece of rolled up leaf. They like to use old fashioned rose leaves, ones that are soft rather than the glossy leaves of many modern roses and also have a preference for wisteria and honeysuckle. In our garden they have loved the old rose Quatre Saison but they will forage for what they need in the hedgerows etc. They cut a circular hole in the leaf and then roll up the piece carrying it in their hind legs.



A leaf cutter bee on our bee house



A hole sealed up with a piece of leaf



The shape left when a bee has cut out a piece of leaf.

You may also see a solitary wasp (also stingless) investigating the holes, these predate the solitary bees. This is a perfect time to make a bee house ready for new bees looking for a home in the spring and we will be making more for them this year. If you are interested and would like more information on the bees.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=829>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/invertebrates/bees-and-wasps/red-mason-bee>

For further reading but with the emphasis on Bumble bees, Dave Goulson's book "A Sting in the Tail" makes excellent reading.