Mason Bees

Mason Bees, *Osima Lignaria*, are a solitary bee. With over 130 species native to North America, there are significant variations in size and color. The most common species is blue and black and about the size of a fly. Most species live in temperate regions and are active in spring and early summer. Mason Bees are passive and safe for families with pets and kids. Males do not have a stinger and while females do, they will only sting when squeezed.

**No Hives = No Stings**

Because Mason Bees are solitary and do not have a queen to protect, they do not build collective hives. Instead, mason bees nest in existing holes wherever they may be found. These can range from dead cambium and plant stalks, to porous mud, or even shells. However, while mason bees work individually and rarely interact with one another, they do have a preference of living near other bees. Their individual nature leaves them far less susceptible to disease and pest problems that can wipe out entire communal bee populations.

**Pollination!**

Mason bees are notoriously effective pollinators. Just two or three females can sufficiently pollinate a mature apple tree! Thanks to their independent nature, all female mason bees are fertile and make their own nests. Mason bees do not produce honey nor beeswax and thus spend virtually all of their time visiting flowers to gather pollen and nectar for their offspring. Once a sufficient provision is reached, the bees lay their eggs with a small mud partition between each cell (this is how the mason moniker came from.)

**Keeping Mason Bees**

In order to survive and thrive, mason bees need to nest in a sunny dry location (however, unlike the honey bees, they will continue to collect pollen and nectar on cold, rainy days making them an even better pollinators for the northwest.) They also need exposed mud to help construct the walls around their larvae as well as, of course, plenty of pollen. Pollen should be available within 300 feet or so of nests to ensure that the bees do not completely abandon a location in search of a more easily accessible food source.

**Over Wintering**

It is possible to build your nests and store mason bees yourself over winter. By mid-fall, open up your mason bee nest and clean the cocoons by soaking them in water and a 5% bleach solution for 15 minutes. Let cocoons dry and then store them in a container filled with paper towels with a few holes for airflow. Place container in the fridge until the following spring when they will be ready to once again help pollinate your yard. It is important to perform a deep clean on the nest as well to prevent mites.