



## Mason Bees in Mason County

By Mary Dessel

Did the Mason bee (*Osmia lignaria*) get its name because it lives in Mason County? Sorry, but no. Mason bees are found throughout North America. They are called Mason bees as they use mud as a building material to construct their nest.

The warm weather of the last few days has brought about an emergence of this small metallic-blue bee. Mason Bees are a gentle bee that rarely stings making them desirable for home gardens.

They are an early pollinator that tends to pollinate fruit trees. In fact, they are such an efficient pollinator of fruit trees that they have been nicknamed the Orchard Bee. Mason Bees carry pollen on their belly hairs rather than in pollen baskets such as honeybees. As the Mason Bee flies from flower to flower, some of the pollen attached to their belly hairs gets deposited as they land on the next flower they visit. This makes them one of the most effective bees at cross pollination.

Mason bees are a solitary bee that tends its own brood instead of having a hive with a queen and worker bees. They build their nests in hollow tubes. In nature they may find holes in trees created by other animals or they may utilize plants with hollow stems. Many backyard gardeners provide nesting boxes with hollow tubes (6" long and 5/16 " in diameter) to encourage Mason Bees into their yard.

Mason bees are currently emerging from their nests. After mating, they search for empty holes that are the right size for construction. The female bees create partitions or cells in the tubes for each egg. She collects nectar and pollen and deposits it in the back of the tube. After laying an egg on top of the nectar/pollen mixture, she seals it off with mud and repeats the process until she has 5 to 8 cells that are provisioned with food and an egg. She seals off the entrance to the tube with a thicker mud wall to keep out predators. In time the eggs will hatch, and larvae will emerge to feed on the nectar/pollen meal that their mother bee has

provided. By end of the summer the larvae form a pupal cell, undergoing metamorphosis into an adult bee. They enter diapause, emerging in the spring as the temperatures warm and blossoms appear on fruit trees to start their cycle of life over again. For instructions on how to build Mason bee nesting boxes:

<https://www.instructables.com/Mason-Bee-House/>

The Master Gardener Annual Plant Sale is online May 1.

### **2021 Plant Sale Details**

**Order, pay and schedule pick up online at: [www.mgfmc.org](http://www.mgfmc.org)**

**Order online: May 1 – 12**

**Covid -19 protocols: All current masking and distancing protocols will be observed at the pick up location.**

Mary Dessel is a Mason County Master Gardener. She serves as Vice-President and chairs the Educational committee. Mary was recently awarded Master Gardener of the Year for Mason County in 2020. She is involved with areas related to education in the Master Gardener program.

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