



Through the Garden Gate: Mason Bees 101

Please join the Mason County Master Gardener's Through the Garden Gate workshop, "Mason Bees 101" on November 13 at 10:00. This free one hour long zoom class provides the basic ins and outs about mason bees. Master Gardener's, Sherry Clemmens and Mary Dessel, will teach you to build a mason bee nesting box as well as to clean mason bee cocoons. If you would like to attend, go to mgfmc.org.

Why learn about mason bees (*Osmia lignaria*)? This gentle, little bee plays a significant role in pollination. It is an early pollinator that tends to pollinate fruit trees such as apples, cherries, and plums. In fact, it is such an efficient pollinator of fruit trees that it has been nicknamed the Orchard Bee. Mason bees carry pollen on their abdominal hairs rather than in pollen baskets such as honeybees. As the mason bee flies from flower to flower, some of the pollen that has attached to their abdominal hairs gets deposited on the next flower it visits. To form fruit, many fruit trees need cross pollination. In cross pollination pollen is transferred from one variety to a different variety of the same type of tree such as an apple tree. Mason bees are one of the most effective bees at cross pollinators.

How do mason bees live? In our workshop you will learn how to build a nesting box and fill it with tubes to attract mason bees into your yard.

Like most of our native bees, mason bees are a solitary bee. After mating, the female bees build their nests in hollow tubes. They supply a meal of pollen and nectar and then lay an egg inside the tube. They do this repeatedly, separating the eggs by a mud partition until they reach the end of the tube which they seal off with a layer of mud. After several days, the eggs hatch; and the larvae emerge to feed on the nectar/pollen meal that their mother bee has provided for them. The larvae grow eventually forming a cocoon where they will undergo metamorphosis into an adult bee. They remain resting in the safety of their cocoon in the nesting tube through the winter months. In the Spring as the

temperatures warm, they chew their way out of their cocoons and emerge to start the cycle of life over again.

Cleaning the bee cocoons is like cleaning a bird house or feeder. Just as we want to keep our songbirds healthy, we want to keep our mason bees healthy too. Pollen mites are a problem as they feed on the pollen/nectar meal intended for the bee larvae causing the larvae to starve. These mites are not harmful to us but can be lethal to the larvae. The activity of cleaning the cocoons helps to kill pollen mites. We end up with healthier bees emerging in the Spring. In our workshop we will also learn how to safely clean the cocoons. We hope you will join us for this fun Fall Through the Garden Gate.

For additional “Through the Garden Gate” information go to www.mgfmc.org or www.facebook.com/masoncountymastergardeners

Mary Dessel is a Mason County Master Gardener. She serves as Vice-President and chairs the Educational committee. Mary was awarded Master Gardener of the Year for Mason County in 2020.

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