

CARE OF DORMANT MASON BEES

Upon receiving filled tubes of dormant cocoons, remember that you are dealing with living, climate sensitive creatures. Unwrap the shipping materials and place them in a cool, dark place to keep them dormant - a garage, unheated basement, or refrigerator. If it is the season for them to break dormancy (are your pears and cherries in bloom?), place them in their house outside. As we get into mid-February, they can emerge from dormancy in as little as 3-5 hours at room temperature. Generally, three to four days in a row above 55°F will trigger males to start emerging outdoors.

If you receive bees that have begun emerging, release any that are alive outside, and place the rest of the tubes in the refrigerator. Chances are, only one or two males emerged, and the bulk of your bees are still fine. Please call us if it seems like too many bees emerged; we will do our best to replace a shipment. Be aware, especially if you live in a warmer climate, of the possibility of premature emergence, and order your bees as early as possible.

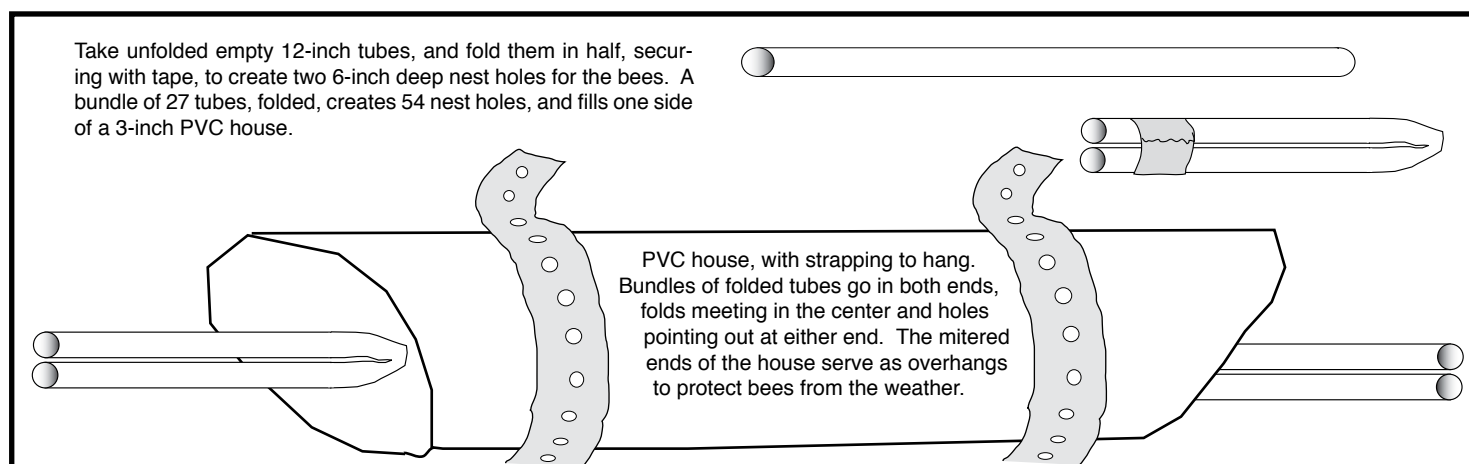
We do our best to cull out any bee tubes that have been parasitized, damaged, or seem only half full. If you feel like the bees you have received never emerged, or emerged before you even opened the package, we will do our best to see you get replacements. Please let us know about any problems with your order as soon as possible!

TUBE FOLDING

The empty tubes that we provide arrive unfolded. A roll of scotch tape and rubber bands are all you need to get them ready to put them out. Mark out the length of a tube, and its center point (6 inches in from either end) on your work surface. With the marks as a guide, use a pair of needle nose pliers or your fingers at the center/6 inch mark, and fold the tube in half so its ends are even with each other. Now add enough scotch tape to hold it together (an inch or so), and keep folding tubes until you have enough.

I've found that twenty-seven is the perfect number of tubes. Twenty-seven 12-inch tubes, once folded, fit inside a length of 3 inch PVC pipe. That means that fifty-four will be how many you need to fill both ends of a 3-inch PVC house. For those of you with the 2-inch pipe, twenty-seven folded tubes will fill both sides of these smaller houses.

For people getting their first mason bees, one or two bundles of 27 empties, plus 2-4 twelve inch folded tubes of bees are a great way to start your population. This ratio of empty tubes to dormant bees ensures that you have enough space for 2-3 years of nesting space as your bees multiply. If you already have nesting spaces (drilled wood blocks are most popular) then 2-4 tubes of cocoons should get you started off with plenty of bees.



SETTING OUT YOUR NESTS

Once your folded empties and the tubes with bees are snug - in a PVC house, a tin can, a small bucket - put it somewhere out of reach of any little hands, curious pets, or routine tasks (like mowing) that might jostle the nest between March and November of each year. Hang the house so that the tubes are horizontal.

Mason bees like morning sun while they are actively flying (March through early June), summer shade while the young larvae are hatching in the tubes, and shelter from wind and rain. It's hard to get all three of these conditions perfectly, but try. My favorite spots for setting houses are on the south or east sides of buildings, close under the eaves, or attached 5-8 feet up in deciduous trees (on a solid branch).

If you are setting out an empty wood block-type nest, and are adding tubes of dormant bees to get started, place the tubes in something (tin cans are great) to protect the cocoons and the emerging bees while they move in to their permanent home, and attach it below or alongside the wood block.

Often, jays, squirrels and woodpeckers can disrupt nests in summer and fall, searching out the tasty developing bees; you can protect your houses with a covering of hardware cloth. The bees will be able to get through, and the critters are kept out.

Questions? Comments?
Want to help grow out mason bees for us?
Contact the Arboretum manager
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Home Orchard Society
ARBORETUM