

about the Mason Bee

Mason bees are small flying insects. There are several species of mason bee, including the orchard mason bee which is native to western North America. They have a dark blue, green or even black iridescent appearance, resembling flies. They are smaller than honey bees. Though the females do have stingers, they **will only sting if squeezed or stepped on**. The sting is described as feeling much like a mosquito bite.



the Mason Bee | Friendly Pollinators

In 2009, The City of Calgary began work on community garden and community orchard projects on public land in order to increase opportunities for local food production activities.

In order for the new orchards to bear fruit in the coming years, they require pollinators. Unfortunately, native honey bee populations have decreased across the continent as a result of parasitic mites, loss of habitat and climatic change. In order to ensure that pollination occurs, Urban Forestry is introducing mason bees at orchard sites and encouraging homeowners to do the same.

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BEE-havior

Mason bees feed on the nectar of flowers, and have a special affinity for fruit blossoms. This makes them excellent early spring fruit pollinators. Orchard mason bees are adapted to cool climates and can fly in chilly, even drizzly weather. As such, they continue to pollinate under adverse conditions that usually halt honey bees. Unlike honey bees, mason bees are **solitary** and **non-aggressive**. There are no worker bees and no honey or beeswax is produced. As a result of this, they are far less protective of their nests. They are also quite shy and tend to fly away when approached.

life cycle

In the early spring the bees emerge from their nests and reproduce. The female then lays her eggs, sealing one or two in their own holes with pollen for nutrition. Within about six weeks of emerging from their nests, the adults die. The fertilized eggs develop into larvae which mature throughout the summer, fall and winter before hatching in the spring.

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management

Female mason bees build their nests in already existing holes, as such it is relatively easy to build artificial homes to accommodate them. Urban Forestry has set up mason bee houses at orchard sites to increase the colonization of the orchards by mason bees.

The bee houses are simple blocks of wood with a series of small holes (5/16" in diameter) drilled into them. The bee houses that have been placed in the community orchards have been made of untreated wood from Memorial poplars. A shingle used as a roof protects the bees from sun and rain.

These boxes will be removed in September/October and stored inside an unheated area over the winter months to protect the bees from predators. They will be replaced in April.

