



The Bee Hotel:

Spring is in full swing outside, so this week we're looking at pollinators. Specifically, bees! Not just any bees though. Not honeybees- OUR bees. These solitary critters are docile, excellent pollinators, and love our gardens. Let's see if we can encourage a few of them to stick around!

Here in New England, we have over four hundred species of bees. Remarkably little is known about these critical species- people most often think of the honeybee, which was actually brought to North America by humans. Long before humans brought honeybees here, North America's flowers were being pollinated for millions of years by our humble and hard-working local bees. These species include the big fuzzy bumblebees, who like to form small colonies underground and the solitary bees like mason bees and leaf-cutter bees. These bees like to nest in tube-shaped nests like hydrangea stems, common reed, cattail, really anything with a hollow stem they can find. Here, a single female bee will lay one or more eggs, and seal them in the tube with some food to protect them from predators and disease. Once the egg hatches and develops, a new bee will emerge to start the life cycle all over again. Some of these bees even over-winter in their little nest! These solitary bees are docile, rarely sting, and love our gardens. We can encourage them by planting pesticide-free and providing a small place for them to nest. Building a "Bee Hotel" is one of the easiest DIY projects out there, and your small homemade version will outperform the store-bought designs ten times out of ten!

Each spring be sure to replace the Bee Hotel with new reed material so you can keep the bees happy and healthy!

Materials:

- Hollow straw-like stems- hydrangea, reed, bamboo, even paper straws will work in a pinch. Each straw should be about six inches long and have holes about ¼" diameter.
- String, twine, tape, or a thick elastic band to hold your hotel together.
- Scissors for cutting reed, straw, and twine

Instructions:

1. Gather some hollow stem plants and cut them to about 6" lengths. The inside diameter should be around $\frac{1}{4}$ ". One DIY Bee Hotel will be made up of a bundle of 5-6 of these hollow stems.
2. Cut them to about 6" with scissors. If you use reeds, try to have a closed node at one end. This keeps your bees safer from predators since they only need to protect one entrance!
3. Bundle the cut stems together and hold them with simple twine, tape, or an elastic band.
4. Deploy your hotel somewhere near your garden, a few feet off the ground, under an eave or deck so they can stay dry, and preferably facing south so our bees can toast up in the sun each day.
5. Check back periodically for anyone moving in!

What to look for:

Look for these small solitary bees coming and going on warm days from the Hotel to the nearest flowers. These bees often cap one or both ends of their nest with a clay/mud mixture, hence their common name "Mason Bees." These Hotels perform better than store bought versions because they're sourced from local material the bees like to use, and they're small. Small is key- since these bees are solitary, they are vulnerable to pests and disease if too many nest close together. By keeping your homemade hotel small, natural, and replacing it each spring you're creating a healthy way to encourage our wonderful local pollinators. Get out there!

Mason Bee:



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Materials:



Simple, DIY lodging for your local bees:

