

A nesting block hanging in a sheltered spot

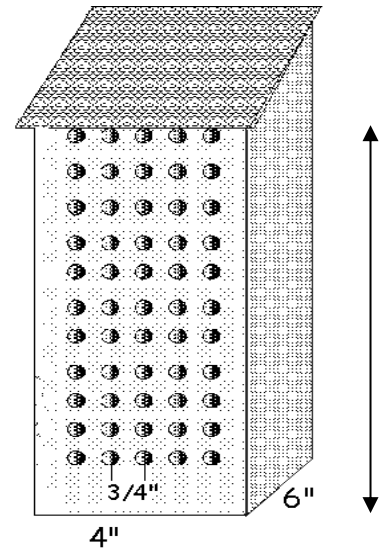
# Bee hotels for native bees

Pollinators – Katja Hogendoorn

Nests for native bees in the garden allows people to observe their native bees and help with pollination of fruit and vegetables. A native bee hotel can attract blue-banded bees, masked bees, leafcutter bees and resin bees. They are fun to watch. Native bees are not aggressive. They only sting if you grab them.

Different substrates are:

- wooden **bee blocks** with pre-drilled holes
- **bundles** of bamboo, hollow twigs or with pithy stems
- **mudbrick** blocks with holes



## A bee block

### The wood

Find a piece of untreated dry wood, at least 13 cm “deep”. The denser the wood, the smoother the insides of the holes will be and the better the bees will like it. Avoid wood with deep cracks. The bees won’t use it as it gives parasites easy access.



The red-tailed resin bee closes its nest with pure resin.



The golden headed resin bee uses a mix of resin and chewed leaves.

### The holes

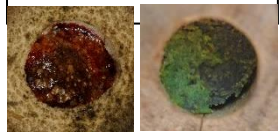
Drill holes of a diameter of 3 - 8 mm and a length of 80-150 mm in the wood, across the grain. Do not drill completely through the timber. Drill the hole to a depth about 10 – 15 mm from the back of the block. A variety of diameters will accommodate different bee species.

### The finishing touches

Attach a roof to provide protection from the midday sun and rain, or place in a sheltered position, in full shade or morning sun. Outside surfaces may be painted or stained, but don’t use wood preservatives. Place or hang the nesting blocks so that bees have open flight access. Affix firmly so that the block does not sway in the wind.



A small resin bee closes her nest in a bee block using resin and small bits of mud, wood or stones.



The nest of the common wasp mimic bee (below)



photo: Kristi Ellingsen



A leafcutter bee uses pieces of leaf to protect her developing offspring



Masked bees make a sort of cellophane to protect their offspring

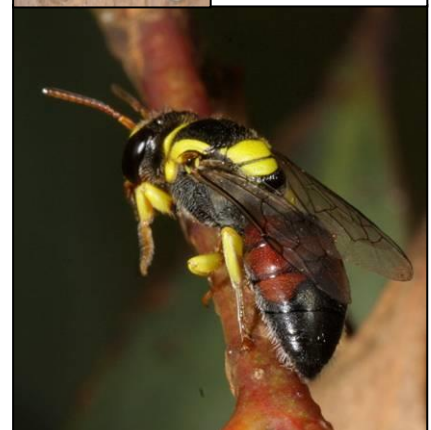


photo: Marc Newman



photo: Marc Newman

## **Bee bundles**

### **Bamboo**

Use small iron saws to saw off stretches of bamboo of different inner diameters (5- 8 mm) at the node. Make sure the open stretch is at least 10 cm. Clean them out with a skewer and bundle them with 10 – 15 using rope or zip-ties. Hang in a sheltered position for example under an eave or a branch.

### **Twigs with pithy stems**

Some bees, such as small carpenter bees, like to dig their own nest. Prune shrubs leaving a length of branch with pithy centres on the plant. Alternatively, stand pruned twigs with pithy stems in existing shrubbery in the shade. Most bees prefer that to the sun.

## **Mudbrick**

Some bees, such as blue-banded bees dig their own nest in clay rich soils. You can make small blocks by using 10 cm stretches of 90 mm square PVC stormwater pipe as casings.

Mix red Adelaide clay soil (without stones or coarse sand grains) with water to a thick paste. Fill the pipe pieces with the clay. After some drying, use a pencil to poke holes (6-7 mm in diameter, 6- 10 cm long). The clay should still be wet, but firm enough so that after withdrawing the pencil from the tunnel, it should keep its inner diameter. Drying time depends on the temperature and the thickness of the clay paste. Then slide the block out of the casing. These blocks can be placed in existing stone walls, but should be protected from rain.

### *Nesting wall*

To make a nesting wall, fill large or small besser blocks with clay. Make sure the clay fills the space, remove air bubbles. After some drying, poke holes of various diameters in the blocks. Use the filled besser blocks to build your wall.

## **Nesting boxes**

Make a nesting box with various substrates.

## **Maintenance**

Find out what the bees like to use and supply more of that type in the next year. Every three years, remove some of the old substrate. Now and then, remove cobwebs.

## **More information?**

- Download the pdf "Bee wall and habitat" from <http://mrccc.org.au/downloads/links/>
- Watch [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVMPM3MtC18](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVMPM3MtC18) and find out how easy it can be to attract native bees.
- Or simply Google 'bee hotel' for more ideas.



### **POLLINATORS**

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