

BEE BLOCKS FOR ORCHARD MASON BEES

MASON BEE MOTEL CONSTRUCTION

- **Wood:** Nesting blocks can be made with dry, new or scrap wood. Pine (w/o pitch) and fir are best. The natural oils in Redwood or Cedar are strong enough to kill bee larvae.

Never use treated wood; arsenic & other preservative chemicals are deadly to bees.

Use 2 x 6, 2 x 8, 4 x 6 or larger boards (2 X 4's are not thick enough for proper length holes). Scrap blocks of laminated beams work as well.

1 ft. lengths of 2 x 6's, 8's, etc., are best, but a little smaller lengths will work too.

- **Drill 5/16" nesting holes** on $\frac{3}{4}$ inch centers, as described below. A 5/16" diameter Brad bit gives better results: smoother walls if drilled slow and squared-off bottoms. Secure block in a drill press or vice.

Scribe a line down the edge of the block, $\frac{3}{4}$ " in from both sides. Starting 1 inch from the top of a block, mark out $\frac{3}{4}$ inch centers down the line.

Drill holes perpendicular to a block's face and as deep as you can, at each mark.

Typical hardware store drill bits are not long enough but will suffice until longer bits can be found. Specialty tool shops offer a variety of bit lengths.

- **Drill hole for hanging block:** Into the back of the block, within the 1 inch area on top, drill a hole with which to hang the Bee Motel on a nail or screw.
- **Blue painters' tape:** You can cover some of the holes with blue tape, to save those holes for next year, if desired. Also put odd-shaped pieces of the blue tape near each hole; this helps the bee find her own nest.

When preparing blocks for sale the following year, John leaves the top 3 holes uncovered for the current years' bees to fill with eggs. The holes below are covered, to be removed the following year.

Remove the blue tape covering the lower holes before hanging your Bee Motel. These empty holes provide ready nesting opportunities for emerging bees.

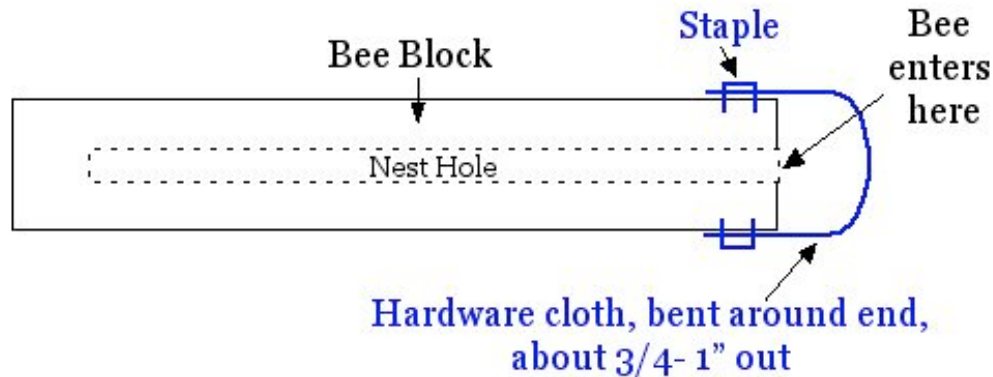
- **Mount** block on a sturdy surface with south-east exposure, facing the early morning sun, for optimal bee health and performance. Spring nights are chilly and they like to warm up before getting to work. Rows of them can be seen with front legs set over the edge of their openings. They pull back, out of sight, if you get too close. You feel at this point your well-meaning but appalling human mug isn't much appreciated.

Do not place blocks where they'll be exposed to direct, hot afternoon sun.

- **Spraying trees:** Apply dormant oil before bees emerge and never apply hard pesticides when pollinating bees are foraging.
- **Hardware cloth or chicken wire** attached to the front of the block deters woodpeckers and squirrels (see sketch below; attach before mounting).

Mason Bee Motel Construction
Orchard Mason Bee Motel
(looking at top)

How to attach hardware cloth or chicken wire



Other Stuff:

- After the bees die off, and your Motel's nesting holes are filled over, you can leave them in place throughout the year. Sometimes, though, when winter temps are exceptionally cold, below zero for extended periods, place them inside an unheated structure out of the weather. Then put them outside in the spring.
- If you've got flickers and woodpeckers cover your Motels with chicken wire or hardware cloth(see above).
- Do not bring your blocks inside your home in winter as the warmth will cause bees to emerge.
- Always discard third year blocks. (You may want to wait if some holes were used the spring before, which sometimes occurs. In such a case place them a good distance from your newest blocks and when activity around the old blocks ceases, remove them.)
- The mess that a previous occupied hole is cannot be drilled out. Doing so smears the left-over debris deeper into the walls and invites disease. It's far easier to drill new holes into new wood and your bees will be all the happier for it.
- John has also experimented with paper liners, so the holes can be reused. See pdf: [Randy Person: Home Made Mason Bee Paper Liners that Work](#)

Sources & Credits

- Bee block construction: John Holbrook, 328 S. 5th St. W., Missoula, MT 59801, 406-728-6223, jholbrook@bigsky.net
- Wire protection idea: John Holbrook, perfected by Fran Wade
- Drawing by Catherine Haug