

HOW TO MAKE A BEE HOTEL



AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL
BOTANIC GARDENS

Alive with learning

Most native bees are solitary, so each female builds her own nest. We can help them by building a 'bee hotel'. Visit the bee hotel at the Australian National Botanic Gardens or use these ideas to make your own!

Native bee expert, Remko Leijds, checks out who's nesting in our bee hotel
© Bush Blitz



Solitary native bees make their nests by burrowing into the soil, rotting wood or pithy stems. A native bee hotel provides hollows for native bees to nest in. The female puts a supply of pollen and nectar in the first 'brood cell' before laying a single egg and sealing up that cell. She repeats the process, establishing multiple brood cells, then closes off the entrance to the burrow. The eggs hatch into larvae which eat their food and moult into pupae. In time, adult bees emerge from the nest.

How to make a bee hotel

Bee Block

Step 1: Find a piece of untreated dry wood at least 13 cm deep (the denser the wood the better).

Step 2: Drill holes of 3–8 mm in diameter across the grain. Drill to a depth of 100–150 mm but not right through the wood. A variety of diameters will accommodate the needs of different bee species.

Step 3: Attach a roof to provide protection from the sun and rain or place it in a sheltered position. Outside surfaces may be painted or stained, but don't use wood preservatives.

Step 4: Place or hang the bee block so bees have open flight access. Make sure it's fixed firmly so it doesn't sway or swing.

PVC Palace

Step 1: Take a piece of white PVC pipe approx. 60 mm wide x 200 mm long.

Step 2: Cover one end of the pipe with sticky tape.

Step 3: Fill the open end of the pipe with paper straws (use uncoated paper straws as plastic or wax-coated straws get too hot and the larvae will die).

Step 4: Securely fix the pipe to a fence post, or other solid surface, in a protected location.



Mudbrick Mansion

Step 1: Make small block casings using 10 cm stretches of 90 mm square PVC stormwater pipe.

Step 2: Mix a clay soil (without stones or coarse sand grains) with water to make a thick paste. Fill the casings with clay and leave to partly dry.

Step 3: Before clay is completely dry, use a sharp, round device to make holes approx. 6–7 mm in diameter and 6–10 cm long.

Step 4: Leave to dry completely and remove blocks from casings. Place the blocks into existing stone walls.



Bee Bundles

The easiest and cheapest bee hotel is a bee bundle.

Step 1: Using bamboo, paper straws or twigs with pithy stems, make a bundle as big as you like and secure it with string or tape.

Step 2: Securely fix the bundle to a solid surface in a sheltered position.



Once you've made your bee hotel, relax and wait for the bees!



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Maintaining your bee hotel

There is no need to try to attract bees to your hotel. If it is there, and they need it, they will come. However, here are some hints for a successful bee hotel:

- Secure the hotel so it is horizontal on a branch, or other similar place, that is firm and out of the way but where you can easily see the holes. Make sure the hotel doesn't swing around or the bees will find it difficult to fly in and out.
- Other creatures, such as spiders, might also like your hotel. If something you don't want moves into your hotel, try to remove it safely.
- As a number of eggs may be laid in each cell, more than one larva could emerge as a bee so don't touch cells until you are sure they are empty. After all bees have emerged you can clean out your hotel for the next season.

What type of bee is that?

Once the bees have finished nesting you will see a small cap at the end of the hollow.

Different types of solitary native bees can be recognised by the cell caps they make. They may be made of resin, pieces of leaf, mud and even small rocks.

Here are some examples:

Leafcutter bee



Resin bee



© Remko Leijts

Mason bee



Carpenter bee



A bee friendly garden

You can also make your garden more bee friendly:

- Leave some areas free of mulch and weed matting as some bees, such as blue banded bees, make their nests in the soil.
- Plant buzz-pollinated plants like sennas, Fringe Lily, flax lilies, Chocolate Lily, Trailing Guinea Flower, velvet bushes and tomatoes.
- Plant nectar-rich plants like fan flowers, Emu Bush, Christmas Bush and Native Juniper.
- Plan your garden to include a diversity of native species that will provide flowers all year round as different bees forage at different times of the year.
- When pruning plants with pithy stems, leave at least 10 cm above the node for the bees to burrow into.
- Leave dead wood for bees to burrow into.



Chocolate Lily



Belalla Gold



Aussie Salute



Native Juniper

For more information

Download our "Native bees" fact sheet at bushblitz.org.au/resources or visit:

- actforbees.org/resources/australian-native-bees
- aussiebee.com.au
- australianmuseum.net.au/bees-suborder-apocrita
- beeaware.org.au/pollination/native-bees