

Montana  Pollinator
Education Project

Mason Bee



ARS-USDA

solitary nester

Background: Apple blossoms
Photo courtesy of ©CoolR, Shutterstock

Mason Bees - *Osmia* spp.

Genus: *Osmia* Family: *Megachilidae*

Metallic green, blue, and purple

5-20 mm long

There are almost 150 species native to North America!



Mason bee is the name usually given to bees in the genus *Osmia*. Just like brick masons build walls, so do mason bees. They construct walls of mud to make divisions in the nest cavity for broods (groups of young). These nest cavities are called brood cells. After the brood cells are completed the mason bee will keep the nest safe by plugging the hole with a mixture of mud, leaves, and other nesting materials.

Mason bees are quite abundant in the western part of the United States, you will only find about 27 of the 150 species east of the Mississippi river. Mason bees carry pollen on the tiny hairs under their abdomen but pollen sticks all over the tiny hairs on their bodies, falling off as they move about. This rapid pollination makes these little bees very important to agriculture and the food we eat. Mason bees are used for pollinating fruit orchards.

Metallic mason would be a great nickname for the mason bee, they are generally metallic in color. The blue orchard bee is an example of this species. These bees are often misidentified as a type of fly because of their metallic color. This bee is robust and round, separating it from other genera of mason bees like the *Hoplitis* and *Chelostoma*.

Mason bees are most likely to build their nests in holes, or tunnels in dead wood or hollow plant stems. They may also build their nests in crevices or abandoned wasp nests. If your class decides to build a bee nesting box with bundled tubes you will likely have mason bee visitors. The mason bee is a solitary gentle bee that does not produce honey. Females do all the work; this little bee only lives about 6 - 8 weeks. Males only live about 2 weeks.

For more information visit: <http://www.crownbees.com>