Reed Nests

- Cut lengths of reeds are an alternative to drilled wooden blocks for trap-nesting and managing some bees, such as the blue orchard bee. The common reed, Phragmites australis, is a marsh-living invasive Eurasian species that is found worldwide. Its stems are perfect for the task.
- Cut dead reed stems using hand clippers. Cut a month or more after frost, or use last year’s stems, as cut growing reeds will rot while dying. Take only the largest reeds, removing attached leaves.
- Reeds have hollow stems, divided periodically by nodes, just like bamboo.
- For bee nesting, saw stems into pieces, each having one node. The node provides the nesting bee with a task plug. Bees can use unplugged tubes.

The soft reeds are easily cut to length, either using a fine-toothed coping saw or an electric bandsaw. Bundling reeds to present uneven lengths can help a nesting female find her nest. Discard thin-walled pieces, as they are accessible to bee parasites, and lengths shorter than 4 inches, which yield mostly male offspring. For blue orchard bees, a cavity no smaller than a pencil’s diameter is desired.

Reeds are easily split to reveal their nest contents. The split halves can be taped back together.

Land: Woodwell, 03/04/2010