

HOW TO: BUILD A BEE HOUSE

SIMPLE PROJECTS FOR CONSERVATION

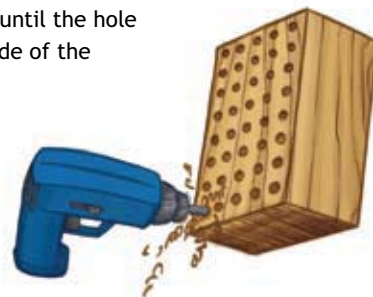
Honey bees may be getting all the press, but they're not the only pollinators in town. The United States is home to almost 4,000 native bee species (honey bees are non-natives brought here from Europe). One way you can help protect pollinators is to build a home for them.

Mason bees lay their eggs in tree holes made by woodpeckers or insects, and you can replicate these holes by building your own bee condo. Nesting starts as early as February in lower states and as late as June in colder areas. Mason bees can be found throughout North America, are very gentle, and are much more efficient than honey bees at pollinating plants.

This simple project is well-suited to youth programs and family activities.



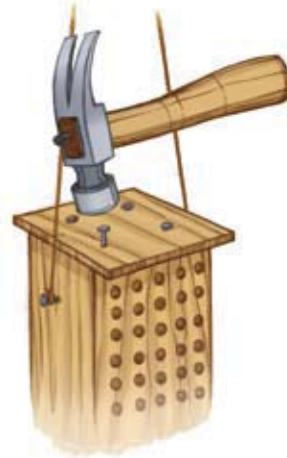
1. Starting at one corner of the block's face, drill a hole in the block. Drill until the hole is about 1/2" from the back side of the block — the hole should be 5" to 6" deep but can be as deep as 10" (longer holes encourage the female bees to lay more eggs). Do not drill all the way through the wood.



2. Drill a second hole 3/4" from the first one and continue to drill holes horizontally and vertically across the wood until the block is covered with holes.

3. Attach the shingle or light piece of wood to the top of the block using finishing nails. The roof should overhang the side with holes in it to keep rain out of the holes.

4. Hang the bee house from a piece of string/wire (hammer a finishing nail into each side of the block and tie the string/wire to the nails) or nail it to a tree, pole, or the side of a building. Look for a spot facing east (bees are stimulated by the morning sun) located as close as possible to flowers or flowering plants. For a list of native wildflowers, trees, and shrubs that support bees, visit <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/nativebee.html#mason>.



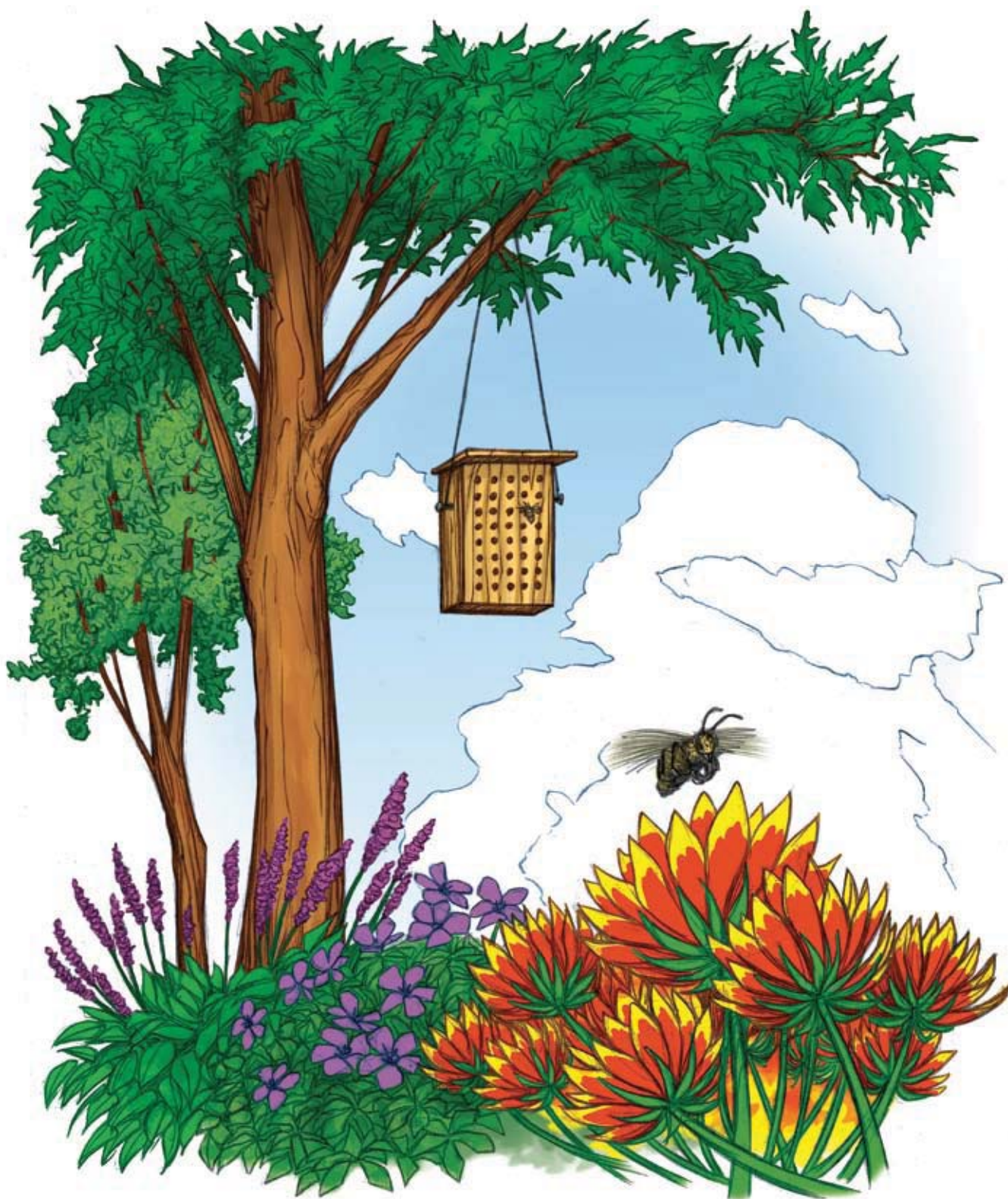
Materials

- Untreated wood block (You can use any piece of untreated wood, even a dead tree limb or scrap of firewood, but the wood should be free of cracks)
- Drill
- 5/16" drill bit (lip-and-spur/brad-point drill bit preferred)
- Shingle or thin piece of wood larger than the wood block
- Finishing nails
- Hammer
- String or wire (if needed)
- Scissors (for cutting string or wire)
- Safety glasses

REQUEST TO READERS

If you build a project based on this or other Outdoor America articles, or if you have an idea for a good conservation project, please e-mail us at oa@iwla.org.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB DRY/WWW.DRYSPOND.COM



Petal Tips

When choosing bee-friendly plants, avoid “doubles.” These plants develop extra petals instead of anthers (the part of the plant that holds pollen), so they have little or no pollen to offer bees. Bees seem to like blue, purple, or yellow flowers, and they particularly like flowers that smell spicy and sweet. If you must spray pesticides in or around your garden, do it in the evening when the bees have flown home.