



Leafcutter Bee Information



For the Willamette Valley- check with your local extension office for dates in your area.



Facts about the leafcutter bee...

- They cut semicircular plant fragments to line their nest cells.
- They are about the size of a honey bee, but darker in color with lighter bands on their abdomen.
- They carry pollen on specialized hairs on their abdomen.
- They are solitary pollinators - no worker bees.
- They rarely sting.
- They do not make honey
- Their foraging distance is about the same as Blue Orchard Mason bees - 100 yards.
- Females build and tend their own nests.
- In nature they nest in cracks, crevices of wood or rock, in beetle holes and pithy stems.

Calendar for Leafcutter Bees

Mid May - June First	Put your leafcutter blocks in your bee house after you take in your tubes/blocks for the Blue Orchard Mason bee. The leafcutter block has 1/4" holes with thin sheets of wood between the layers. Tape the back onto the leafcutter bee block and place the block inside the bee house to give the bee a dark hole. The blocks need to be protected. <i>Note: Do not shove the block to the back of the bee house. The front edge should be about 2" inside the bee house.</i>
June - October	Leafcutter bees are active. Evidence is a semicircle cut out of a leaf (especially on smooth leaves like rose, lilac and serviceberries).
October First	Put blocks in a paper bag with the top folded over and stapled shut. Put the block in an unheated garage or shed for the winter. Leave it there until late spring.
October - May	The leafcutter is at the pre-pupa and pupa stage during this time. The pupa inside the cell will develop into an adult leafcutter bee over the late winter and spring.

House Placement

- Optimum height of bee house from ground is about 3-6 feet. Yes, it can be higher.
- It should be high enough to be above the rain splash zone, but don't install it too high - you will want to watch the bees in action!
- The bee house should be placed on a wall that receives morning sun, such as the southeast wall of your home. If you don't have great morning sun, give them as much as you can, bees survive in the wild without this. Your bees just do better with that morning sun.
- You also need to think where the afternoon sun is, as you do not want the nesting box to be in direct sun in the afternoon. It will get too hot for the bees and may kill them.
- The opening of the bee house should face away from prevailing winds and rain as much as possible, in order to keep the holes dry.
- Don't place your house too far under a porch, as bees may not be able to find the house easily. They use UV light to navigate.
- Don't place the bee house over a pond or water source. Your bees haven't taken swimming lessons, and many could drown.
- Place the bee house away from your bird feeder, as bees make tasty morsels, especially to woodpeckers and flickers.

TIP - You can put a mesh screen about 4-6 inches over the opening of the house to help keep birds from getting to the cocoons. (Chicken wire or any mesh with about 1" holes that allow the bees to easily fly helps.)

More facts about leafcutter bees...

Leafcutter bees are a **solitary** bee species, meaning they do not produce colonies like social insects (honeybees, wasps, ants) and do not store honey. However, they are a **very efficient pollinator**. They are approximately the size of a honeybee but are somewhat darker in color and have lighter bands on their abdomen. Leafcutter bees **are not aggressive** and will not sting or bite unless they are being handled. In the wild, leafcutter bees nest in soft, rotted wood or in the stems of large pithy plants and use cut leaf fragments to form nest cells, which is where their name comes from. In commercial agriculture leafcutter bees **nest in supplied wood** or Styrofoam boards with pre-drilled holes. During pollination leafcutter bees are stored in large wooden houses or trailers. Leafcutter bees are more efficient pollinators than honey bees in alfalfa seed fields because the honey bee is worried about being struck in the head when they trip the reproductive structure of the alfalfa flower; this is not a problem for the leafcutter bee.

<http://agsci.oregonstate.edu/coarec/bees>

Both Megachile and the genus Osmia belong to the family Megachilidae, meaning "large jaw," referring to their large mandibles. Megachile is non-metallic and dark bodied, often with abdominal hair bands. They are called leafcutter bees because they cut small pieces of leaves and flowers to line their nest cells. One non-native species, Megachile rotundata, is managed commercially in Oregon for the pollination of alfalfa. There are approximately forty species in Oregon.

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODA/shared/Documents/Publications/IPPM/ODABeeGuide.pdf>

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw692>

<https://pnwhandbooks.org/insect/bee-protection/alfalfa-leafcutting-bee>

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/leafcutter-bee>