

Mason Bees in Your Garden



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Bees have gotten a lot of press lately, and with good reason. Misuse of pesticides, loss of habitat, diseases and parasites have caused a worldwide decline in many pollinator populations. With the decline in honeybee populations, orchardists have come to rely on orchard mason bees to pollinate their fruit trees. The friendly little shiny blue-black bee is helpful in backyard gardens, as well. It naturally seeks out hollow stems and insect holes to nest in. Gardeners can improve chances of attracting mason bees to their yards by building homes for them. The bees will show their appreciation by improving plant health and yield.

Mason bees are not aggressive, so you can be nearby and they will simply continue their nectar foraging. Bee boxes can be simple or extravagant, but must be stable, have protected tubes for bees to live in, have sun exposure, and provide access to a small area of mud. You can purchase paper straws and place them in a coffee can, wooden bee house, or a piece of PVC pipe. Many people simply drill multiple 4" deep holes into a piece of untreated 4"x6" piece of wood. An ideal hole diameter is 5/16". Be sure not to drill completely through the wood! Firmly mount your bee house to a dry south side of fence posts, trees, or buildings in the spring before cherry trees have bloomed, because this is when adult mason bees break their dormancy. Do not move the nest at all before October. Developing larvae knocked off its food source will not survive.

Attract mason bees to your garden with purple, yellow, and blue short-tubed flowers including lavender, echinacea, salvia, borage, bee balm and foxglove. Your bees will be all too happy to pollinate your vegetables, too. If you aren't able to attract wild bees to your bee



Build a box and mason bees will come.

box, mason bee cocoons are also available for purchase at local nurseries.

Mites are a mason bee's biggest enemy. They dine on the pollen left for the larvae, and the bee will not survive. Dedicated bee keepers use cardboard straws with removable inner paper liners in their boxes. Every spring, each liner is removed and peeled, and the individual cocoons are gently rinsed in a diluted bleach solution to kill any mites. **Important: do not leave them at room temperature for more than a couple hours.** After they are rinsed and dried, cocoons can be placed in a safe place outside or tucked into your refrigerator. This process is not a necessary step. You will, however, see a dramatic increase in your population from year to year. You will soon feel compelled to give them away to friends and fellow gardeners, and feel proud that you have contributed to the health of your yard, the neighborhood and the environment.

—contributed by Shannon

The author has generously offered two tubes of mason bee cocoons to the first 10 readers who build bee houses. If you have built a bee house, contact Nat at (503) 284-8420. Photos are encouraged!

Winter Recipe: Root Vegetable Soup

Welcome to the dead of winter, ladies and gentlemen! Well, “dead” is a bit dramatic, really. Now is the time to enjoy all that vitamin-rich kale, chard, and beets as our seasonal vegetables have taken a turn towards the dark, rooty, and leafy. Root vegetables in season now, such as parsnips, turnips, potatoes, carrots, yams, and celeriac (celery root), provide essential vitamins all while filling the belly and satisfying the soul. My favorite root veggie soup combines these winter classics with some simple vegetable or chicken stock, a dash or three of cumin, paprika, and some good old fashioned salt and pepper. It’s a great way to feed your family a warming, hearty meal without the butter, cream, and cheese:

- Three medium-size parsnips

- One yam
- Three medium-size carrots
- Two medium-sized yellow potatoes
- One yellow onion
- One small turnip
- One small celeriac root (this is just for a little extra flavor, so feel free to exclude it if you want to cut down on waste)
- Five cups chicken or vegetable stock
- One Tbls. Cumin and paprika

Peel and roughly chop all the veggies, but only use about half of the celeriac—it has a very powerful flavor. Steam or boil the whole lot of them (draining thoroughly if boiled) until very tender. Add the stock and bring to a simmer, seasoning as it warms. Next, grab your potato masher and go to town! The way I finish this soup is by scooping the chunky mixture into



Flickr.com/podnet

my blender and puréeing the whole thing in shifts, since I don’t have one of those fancy hand-held blenders. And there you go! Super healthy, delicious, and filling winter root soup. Serve with some bread for dunking and you’re good to go!

See? Who says the dead of winter has to be so dreary? This soup keeps quite well so feel free to make extra and pass it around! Grow what you’ll love and love what you grow—Happy winter, everyone!

—contributed by Roxanne Myslewski

Youth Grow Corner



Pretend You’re a Plant!

This game is a great way to help kids learn to identify the different phases of the plant life cycle. Act out the lifecycle of a plant using your whole body! What kind of vegetable will you be?

- First, curl up into tight ball: You’re a seed!
- Pretend to be a rain cloud and rain on the little seeds underneath the soil. Then slowly uncurl and kneel. They’ve sprouted!
- Slowly uncurl feet, staying low to the ground. You’ve grown roots.
- Stick up arms like a little sprout—you’ve sprouted.
- Open your hands palms up, and wiggle your fingers—you’ve grown baby leaves.
- Wiggle your toes. You grow lots of little roots (rootlets).
- Grow a little taller and spread arms and hands out wider. You’ve grown bigger leaves. Your leaves are soaking up the sun, and making food for the plant.
- Stand up (feet together)- You grow taller.
- ‘Slurp, slurp’- Your roots drink up water from the ground.
- Spread your fingers wide and surround your face- Your flowers are blooming.
- Pretend to be a bee or butterfly, and fly around the room pollinating the little flowers.
- Interlock your fingers and make a circle over your head- you’ve produced a juicy ripe tomato (or other fruit or vegetable).
- For some reason, in this garden, this one little fruit or vegetable was forgotten by the garden. You sway back and forth, and suddenly...
- ‘Splat!’- The tomato (or other vegetable) falls off the stem and breaks on the ground.
- Little bugs and insects help the tomato break down, and suddenly, you are left with a tiny seed.
- Start from the beginning! Your new seed will grow into another fruit or vegetable.

Seed Selection for the Home Garden

Though year-round gardening is possible in Portland, the short, dim days of winter provide little compared to the abundant late summer harvests. It is in these weeks of rest and contemplation that we invent next year's garden, through thoughtful evaluation and selection of seeds.

Know your Plot

Assess last year's garden by considering how much food you harvested, how resistant to pests and disease each plant was, what varieties tasted best, and which were most effective at shrinking your monthly food costs. Choosing the right variety can do a lot to increase your yields.

Read Between the Lines

Seed catalogs and display shelves feature thousands of seeds, making it difficult to single out one variety from the multitudes. Taking a closer look helps narrow the list down to those that best meet your needs.

Start with the Days to Maturity. This number estimates how long it will take your seeds to transform into food-producing plants. However, Portland's cool summer nights considerably lengthen the recommended time needed for heat-loving vegetables to reach maturity. Choosing varieties that require the fewest days to mature means that you will harvest more food earlier in the season.

The Days to Maturity countdown starts once the plant begins to grow, or germinate, not simply when you plant the seeds. Different seeds germinate at different temperatures, and it's important to remember this fact when calculating what to buy. Cool season crops, such as lettuce, peas and spinach, need a soil temperature of at least 40 degrees, while most other garden vegetables, especially tomatoes, peppers and corn, need a soil temperature of 70 degrees or more to germinate.

Finally, read the description carefully. If the plant's flavor or productivity is not mentioned, then it won't excel in either category.

Where to get seeds

If you are in the first three years of the Home Gardens Program, you will receive an assortment of seeds in early spring. Garden supply stores provide an abundance of seeds. If you are using older seeds, plant more than you expect to need—not all will germinate.



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Read seed packet descriptions carefully.

Seed catalogs provide the greatest quality and selection, though their prices are steep due to shipping. Consider placing a group order or splitting packets with other gardeners. The earlier you order, the better your chances at getting the varieties you want!

Locally grown seeds are often the best choice, as they are bred by selecting plants that perform well in our region's unique growing conditions. Locally owned nurseries and garden supply stores often carry seeds from PNW producers.

Homegrown seeds are available free of charge from both of Portland's tool libraries. Borrowing from the seed bank means returning seeds the following season from plants you grew. Your own garden is the most cost-efficient seed source out there!

—contributed by Sarah West

Resources

- Growing Garden's *Home Garden Manual*: more information on seed saving and crop planning
- Southeast Portland Tool Library and Seed Bank: <http://www.septl.org/index.php>
- Northeast Portland Tool Library and Seed Bank: <http://portlandseedlibrary.com/>
- Naomi's Organic Farm Supply: naomisorganic.blogspot.com/

Soil Temperatures for Direct Seeding:

- 40° F or warmer: Lettuce, kale, peas, spinach.
- 50° F or warmer: Onions, leeks, turnips, chard.
- 60° F or warmer: Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, beans, beets.
- 70° F or warmer: Tomatoes, squash, corn, cucumbers, melons, peppers.



GROWING GARDENS

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Garden Calendar Calendario del Jardin

February/febrero:

- **Cut down cover crops** and incorporate them into the soil. *Cortar cultivos de cobertura y incorporarlos a la tierra.*
- A good time to plant **fruit trees**. *Febrero es un buen mes para sembrar árboles frutales.*
- **Start seedlings indoors**. You can also pick up starts at Plant Distribution Day in May. *Empezar a cultivar las plantas de semillero en su casa o en un invernadero. También puede conseguir plantas de semillero durante el Día de Reparto de Plantas en mayo.*
- **Plant cold-resistant peas** outside once soil is dry enough to work. *Sembrar arvejas resistentes al frío en su huerto cuando la tierra este suficiente seca.*



March/marzo:

- **Make a garden plan**. First year gardeners: if you have a mentor, he or she will set up a time to meet and help. Planificar su huerto. *Si es su primer año siendo jardinero: si tiene un mentor, le contactara para reunirse con usted y ayudarle en su planificación.*
- First, second and third year gardeners: **Your seeds** will be delivered by volunteers. *Si es su primer, segundo o tercero año siendo jardinero: Sus semillas se entregaran por los voluntarios.*
- Continue to **start seedlings** indoors. *Continuar a cultivar las plantas de semillero dentro de su casa.*
- **Plant onions and cool season crops** (carrots, beets, broccoli, leeks, peas, radishes, etc.) once soil is dry enough to work. *Sembrar las cebollas y cultivos de temporada fresca (zanahoria, betabel, brócoli, puerro, arveja, rábano, etc.) cuando la tierra este suficiente seca.*