Native Solitary Bees

Native solitary bees are not honeybees and they are not Africanized “killer” bees. Instead, they are bees native to our area that live a solitary existence, only meeting others of their species when they mate. They don’t live together in hives so don’t have a queen to protect. So they are much less likely to sting.

There may be as many as 1,000 species of these bees in the Sonoran Desert region. They play an important role in pollination of native plants and crops. There are many kinds of native bees including carpenter, leaf-cutter, digger, sweat, mason, long-horned bees and others.

To help support these pollinators, we can provide plants with flowers in our gardens. We can also provide them with the small, deep holes they need for laying their eggs. They deposit a series of eggs in these holes separated by digested plant matter.

Native bees typically build their own holes in soft wood (like the dried stalks of desert spoon, agave, yucca) or in the ground. But in our neighborhoods often there isn’t a lot of this soft wood. There may also not be soft ground in which to tunnel.

So we provide this set of do-it-yourself instructions for those that would like to help native solitary bees to reproduce.
D.I.Y. Bee Nest Instructions

**Tools/Materials Needed:** scrap wood, drill & 6” bits, wire, screws & screwdriver

- Use *untreated* scrap lumber or pieces of tree limbs
- Glue or bolt small pieces of wood together to create a larger nest if desired
- Drill holes in wood with 3/16”, 1/4”, and/or 5/16” bits. Make holes at least 3” deep, 1” apart, and be sure they dead-end! (do not go all the way through.)
- Drill holes horizontally or tilted slightly up at the back to prevent them filling in rain
- Remove all sawdust from holes
- Use screws to attach a length of wire on the back for hanging
- Install the nest where it is protected from excessive wind, rain, and sun and attach it so it won’t shake, vibrate or move too much. Can be full or part shade.
- Finish the wood if desired, with a 50/50 mix of turpentine and linseed oil but avoid the bee holes.
- Leafcutters, Mason bees, and other small bees will find and use the nest from late spring to fall. They cap tunnels when finished with egg laying.
- Don’t worry about cleaning the tunnels, the bees take care of that and reuse the nest sites.
NOTE: Your nest will not attract honeybees or killer bees and is safe to have near walkways, patios, and play spaces. The bees that use it are solitary and docile.

Source: Greg Corman, Gardening Insights, Inc. www.gardeninginsights.com

Window shades made from desert spoon flower stalks (*Dasylirion wheeleri*), which bees have used for nesting.