Leafcutter Bees

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Who are Leafcutter Bees?

The leafcutter bees are a useful friend to gardeners as they provide valuable and efficient pollination for plants such as your summer vegetable gardens. Like mason bees, these bees are cavity nesting and need ready-made nests such as soft rotting wood, pithy plants stems like roses or man made tubes. Once a suitable home is found the leafcutter bee will build its nest using a piece of leaf for lining, which they will use to make a cylindrical cavity that looks like a cigar. Leafcutter bees will cause crescent or almost circular shaped hole in a leaf. This damage does not harm the plant. Like mason bees these bees are gentle and observed without the fear of being stung.

What do they pollinate?

Leafcutters are very efficient pollinators. They prefer legume blossoms, but are not limited to one plant's nectar. These bees are summer generalist that pollinates most flowers as well as melons, peas and other fruits and vegetables.

How do you hatch the cocoons?

Your bees will arrive safely tucked away in their cocoons inside a small cardboard box. These developing bees need to be protected. Leafcutter bees need a constant temperature of 35^0C/84^0F and humidity ranging between 40%-90%, at these temperatures the bees will take 23 days to emerge. At lower temperatures such as 21^0C/70^0F the emergence is will take 4 to 6 weeks.

If you are hatching both mason bees and leafcutter bees, the cocoons can be placed into the baby bee nursery (loft section) of your bee house (either the Bee & Bee Villa or the Bee Bop Barn). The mason bees will hatch first and once temperatures are warm enough the leafcutter bees will hatch. It is typical in early spring conditions that it will take 6 to 8 weeks for the leafcutter bees to emerge. These bees need mid-to-high 70°F (21°C) to fly, but perform best in 80°F (31°C) or higher temperatures.

How much coverage?

Leafcutter bees forage with in 100 meters or 300 feet of their nest. The average yard can use upwards of 100 cocoons.

Next Season

September/October your leafcutter bee pupae for next season will be in your reeds. These reeds can be removed from the house and placed into a plastic container stored in a cold place such as an unheated basement or garage until next season. Next season place you reeds out into your house once temperatures have reached optimal conditions.

Reference:
http://www.seeds.ca/pollination/pollinator-profiles/bees/leafcutter

Bee friendly plants?

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Plant Name	Notes
ALFALFA	leafcutter bees and honey bees
BLUEBERRIES	Over 115 kinds of bees, including bumblebees, mason bees, mining bees and leafcutter bees

or a comprehensive list of crops and their respective pollinator, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_plants_pollinated_by_bees

Source: S.E. McGregor, "Insect Pollination of Cultivated Crop Plants." USDA, 1976 http://gears.tucson.ars.ag.gov/book/index.html