

How to make an Australian Native “Bee Inn”/ Bee Hotel

For ground nesting bees – Blue-banded bee and others (includes mud brick houses/mortar):

- Prepare a mortar mix of 3 parts sand, 1 part clay.
- Make a mud pie using this recipe and place it in frame (old plant pot, pipe, besser brick block or anything similar) with a pilot hole as an example, roughly the diameter of a pencil.
- Put one nesting block under cover and one out in the garden and see which one is more successful.
- Perhaps try different diameter pilot holes, different sand/clay mixes to see which works best for your bees.

For solitary bees that nest in timber - Leafcutter, Resin, Reed and others:

- Diversity again is the key.
- Drill a range of holes as deep as your drill bit, into a hard or soft wood that is not chemically treated. Don't drill through the wood, the tunnel must have a dead end. Sizes I've used are 3 mm - 8mm.
- Use timber that is not uniform, as bees identify their nest by visual cues.
- Bees like smooth sides, so ensure that as you are drilling you clear the excess shavings out of the hole.
- Find a frame, old box, wheel, whatever. Place your drilled bits of wood into it, remembering that wood in its nature, will shrink and expand with the weather. You may need to add a few extra bits as it loosens.

Placement of your Bee Inn/Hotel:

- This design doesn't have a roof, so I call it the “Backyard Verandah Research Lab” model!
- Sit it on a table, secure it to a wall or hang it under an eave – so that it doesn't swing, perhaps use two hooks.
- Put it in a place that is facing the morning sun; sheltered from the wind and driving rain and facing slightly downwards.
- It is sometimes suggested that you have a wall or some plants positioned on the western side, to reduce the summer heat. Some bees also like a bit of privacy!

SEEDS for BEES, from the Backyard Garden Enthusiast of course!

- Australian native bees love flowers for their nectar and pollen and don't mind if it is a native plant or an exotic.
- Plan to have plants flowering in your garden throughout the year, with different coloured and shaped flowers, to suit bees of all sizes.
- If you want a Blue-banded bee to visit your garden, my recommendation is to buy a packet of Rock Isotome seeds. Blue-banded bees will definitely visit and if they don't, give me a call!

When will a Native Bee visit?

- Native Bees are out and about from September to March and you may be lucky enough to see a bee nesting and/or hatching, so keep a keen eye on your Bee Inn. Or, you may see a newly capped nest as evidence that they've been there.
- I've placed mine where I will pass it every day, on the verandah.
- Be patient, it may take a season or two for them to find their new nesting place, as sometimes they seem to prefer older holes.

Other Lodgers:

Solitary wasps. Spiders. Lizards. Ants. Birds will also have a little look in if they're hopping by.

Maintenance:

Not needed. Some of the “hatched” nests may be inhabited by other bees/insects. Nature has its own cleaners, we don't need to do this for them.

Who is the Backyard Garden Enthusiast?

Joanne is the Enthusiast; a role that has evolved from making garden art and a Bee Inn that appeared in the award-winning Australian garden at the Chelsea Flower Show, to growing Australian native flower and grass seed for sale to gardeners. Keep up with her continuing journey on Instagram and via www.backyardgardenenthusiast.com.au

