

Harvest, Clean & Store Mason Bee Cocoons

1. Harvest: How to remove Cocoons from liners & laminated blocks

Cardboard & Paper Liners –

- a. Gently pry open the liners to check for possible pests and to harvest the cocoons.
 - i. Or... Tear liners open (like a tube of biscuits) and gently remove contents.
- b. Gently separate the cocoons & brush off. Cleaning will get off the rest.
- c. Gently remove mud and frass (brown, peppery looking) from cocoon.
- d. Liners can be soaked in clean water for 10-15 minutes before harvesting.
- e. Set a timer. The soaking softens the liner for easier opening.

Wood (laminated) Blocks –

- f. Cocoons can be removed by using a cleaning tool (1/4" dowel) that is filed or sanded to a 45-degree angle. (This helps lift the cocoon up).
- g. Gently push cocoons out of the laminated block channels.
- h. Keep the tool parallel to the block. If the tool is at an angle, you will squish and even pop and destroy the bee in the cocoon.
- i. If the dried mud is very hard spray with some water to soften the mud.
- j. Gently separate the cocoons & gently brush off. Cleaning will get off the rest.

2. Clean: Wash and Clean Cocoons

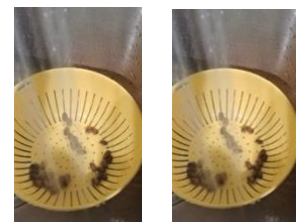
- **Bleach dissolves part of the outer silk cocoon and kills chalkbrood fungus.**
- **Dish detergent breaks the surface tension of mites on cocoons - kills the mites.**
- **Not recommended: Sand washing - does not kill chalkbrood.**

- a. Prepare water with bleach and an unscented dish detergent (such as Dawn).
 - i. Add 1 - 2 drops of any unscented dish detergent to one Gallon of COLD water
 - ii. Then Add to 2 oz. (4 Tblsp.) Bleach to the same gallon of cold water



- b. Add cocoons - **2 minutes. No longer. Use a timer.**
- c. Swirl cocoons around. You can very gently-lightly remove some of the frass, mud, and brown and yellow residue.
- d. Take cocoons out of the bleach-detergent water after 2 minutes – a small kitchen strainer pictured works great.

- e. **RINSE TWICE** in COLD water to remove Bleach and Detergent.
 - i. Use fresh water and a gentle cold stream of water
 - ii. A strainer of some sort can help contain the cocoons while rinsing.



- f. **Dry the Cocoons** - Put the cocoons on a dry paper towel – wait a few minutes- then transfer to a 2nd dry towel for better drying.
- Do not use hair dryers or other sources of heat. You don't want the cocoons to hatch!



3. Store Cocoons Over the Winter: Vegetable drawer in fridge – Oct- March

- Put a damp (not dripping wet) paper towel in a small container.
- Put the small container in the larger container
- Put cocoons on the dry paper towel in the larger container.
- Cover larger container- lid should have a few small air holes.
- The containers should be checked periodically.**
 - If paper towel in small container is dry, add a fresh damp (not sopping wet) paper towel.
 - Note: Most refrigerators are frost free. The vegetable bin is usually more humid. The extra dampness of the paper towel adds more humidity so that your cocoons don't dry out.
 - If there is mold, re-wash in a light bleach solution of 1/2 tsp bleach per quart for no more than 1 minute. Air dry again. Clean container with bleach- put in fresh paper towels and add cocoons.



4. Final step: Clean tools and blocks

- BLEACH - DETERGENT WASH YOUR TOOLS & BLOCKS.**
 - DO NOT** soak your wooden blocks and tools - prevent warping Rinsel!
 - Note: Prevent warping- clean in bleach-detergent solution & clamp blocks back together.
- You can dry surfaces with a hairdryer on high temp after you clamp laminated blocks back together to help eliminate warping.



What's Next? Put your cocoons out in the Spring

- Leave your cleaned cocoons in the fridge until Mid-March – April
- Watch for signs:
 - Fruit trees are blossoming, early spring native plants are flowering
 - Temperature is above 55 degrees consistently
- Subscribe to “Bee Notes”- Get reminders & tips on managing your Mason Bees & get important dates on when to perform some actions.

Bee Notes Newsletter: [Click to subscribe](#)

12-10-24