

Beneficial Insects



Leafcutter Bees

Common and Scientific Names

- Common name: Leafcutter bee
- Scientific: *Megachile*

Description

Most common leafcutter bees are approximately the size of the common honeybee. They are somewhat darker than honeybees with light bands on the abdomen. Leafcutters are solitary bees and do not live in large groups or colonies like honeybees.

Life Cycle

Leafcutter bees do not eat the cut pieces of leaves they remove. They carry them back to the nest and use them to fashion nest cells within previously constructed tunnels. They fill each cell with a mixture of nectar and pollen and the female lays an egg and seals the cell.

Leafcutter bees overwinter in these nests as newly formed adults. In the following spring adults chew their way out of the nest.

Habitat and Preferred Plants

Leafcutter bees make nests in soft, rotted wood; thick-stemmed, pithy plants and/or materials that the bees can easily cut through and excavate. They will only tunnel in soft, rotted wood and do not cause damage to homes or other wooden structures.

Leafcutter bees use the leaves of almost any broadleaf deciduous plant to construct their nests. Some species of leafcutter bees use petals and resin in addition to leaves. These bees will commonly cut circles from ornamental plants such as roses, azaleas, ash, redbud, bougainvillea, and other plants with thin, smooth leaves.

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How They Benefit the Environment

Leafcutter bees are important pollinators of wildflowers, fruits, vegetables and other crops. Some are used as commercial pollinators in crops such as alfalfa and blueberries.

What We Can Do to Support Them and Increase Their Numbers

Avoid applying pesticides, insecticides or miticides to flowering plants. Pesticide drift to nearby blooming plants, including weeds, should likewise be avoided. Ensure hives or bee boxes are removed from the area before application.

Source:

- <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/insects/leafcutter-bees-5-576/>
- https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/misc/bees/leafcutting_bees.htm
- http://ipm.ucanr.edu/mitigation/protect_bees.html