



Building a Bee and Bug Hotel and Restaurant

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Bee hotels have become very popular. A bee hotel is a structure you stick in your garden, with the idea that it gives native solitary bees a place to nest, rest and breed.

Bee hotels can become unhealthy homes if not managed properly pests such as parasitic wasps and ants will find a ready smorgasbord when there is a concentration of bees. Here is a list of good and bad tips when building a bee hotel.

Good	Bad
Have a backing on the hotel to shelter the bees	Don't use cardboard, particle board or chipboard for frame as these disintegrate in wet weather
Put a sloping roof with overhang for landing	No roof leaves insects exposed to wind and rain
Have smaller hotels scattered about 20 metres apart. Different bees need different nest sites.	Large hotels make it harder to clean out – an essential task for keeping pests and diseases in check
Put shallow trays with water filled with pebbles or damp sand	Bees can drown in open water
Use bamboo sticks with up to 1cm openings	More than 1 cm across won't get used. Cut behind the bamboo nodes ("walls") so the entrance is not blocked
Drill 15 cm into untreated sections of cut logs using a variety of drill bits ranging from 3 mm - 8 mm. Space the holes around 2 cm apart.	Use sharp drill bits to minimise burrs to keep the tunnels smooth and inviting. Splinters and rough edges inside holes can rip fragile wings
Use a mix of materials – fennel stems: strip the foliage from the main stem and cut into lengths at least 10-15 cm. Soft stems of lantana, grapevines and hydrangeas are also good; The soft cushion filler and thin wood shaving are for birds to use in their nests.	Do not use plastic or glass tubes as they hold too much moisture
Clay packed pipes and blocks for blue-banded bees which nest in the soil. Pack the clay or clay soil into PVC piping or concrete blocks. Use a stick about 8mm wide to poke holes into the clay about 10-15cm deep. Blue-banded bees pollinate tomatoes.	Don't have less than 15cm holes as some bees lay female eggs at the back and male in the front. If it's too short you'll only get males and no future egg-layers.
Bees like sunny aspects. The nest should be at least one metre off the ground about 1.5m to 2m.	Don't place the hotel where it gets excessively hot as this can kill the larvae.

Look at the computer to find ideas. Investigate what your garden friends will enjoy the most.

Bee and Bug Hotels are far from being just a set and forget. They do require maintenance to keep a healthy home for your garden friends.

Tips for hotel housekeeping

Use cardboard liners in drilled holes to easily remove the remnants and diseases in your B "n" B Hotel.

Bees are season creatures and only active in spring and summer. The adults die off in autumn and winter.

Resin bees lay their eggs with a stash of food then seal off the end with some resin. Some will hatch the same season — you'll see a hole in the resin seal — and over winter it's important to clean out old nesting material to reduce the risk of diseases.

Build a Bee and Bug Restaurant

The key is definitely local native plants — ones with nectar-producing flowers, such as Callistemon species (bottlebrushes), banksias, melaleucas, grevilleas and eucalypts. Daisies, fan flowers (*Scaevola*) and pea flowers such as *Hardenbergia comptoniana* (Native Wisteria) are also good.

Introduced species such as Lavender, Buddleja, herbs - Basil, Thyme, Borage, Sage and Parsley. Salvias and daisies are also popular.

Ways to welcome insects in your garden

- Stop using pesticides
- Put out shallow trays of water filled with pebbles or damp sand; bees can drown in open water
- Plan your garden for year-round flowering especially in late winter/early spring when they need plenty of nectar.
- Plant native and exotic species of flowers in clumps that are easily seen; research suggests native bees prefer blue, yellow or white, rather than red and orange flowers
- Allow a few corners of your garden to become a little "messy", with dead wood and bare soil for ground-nesting bees

Even native gardens can't replace bushland — you always find more bees in bushland, so we need to keep that as much as possible — but second best is improving gardens by adding native plants.



Look out for the native bee hotel display in the New Museum 2020 in a gallery called Wild Life.

References:

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