

Bee Hotel Maintenance

Proper maintenance of a bee hotel is essential not only for the health of the bees that use it, but also to extend the life of the hotel itself. Because bee hotels have many tunnels close together, fungus and mites may spread more easily than they would in a natural environment.

Cleaning your bee hotel every year is important to ensure that your bee hotel benefits bees. The steps to do so may look different depending on the style of your bee hotel, but there are a few basics that can be applied.



Timing of cleaning

Many different species of bees use your bee hotel, and they all hatch at different times. You can clean your hotel when you see that the tunnels have emptied, or if you are unsure, you can use an emergence chamber as described on the next page.

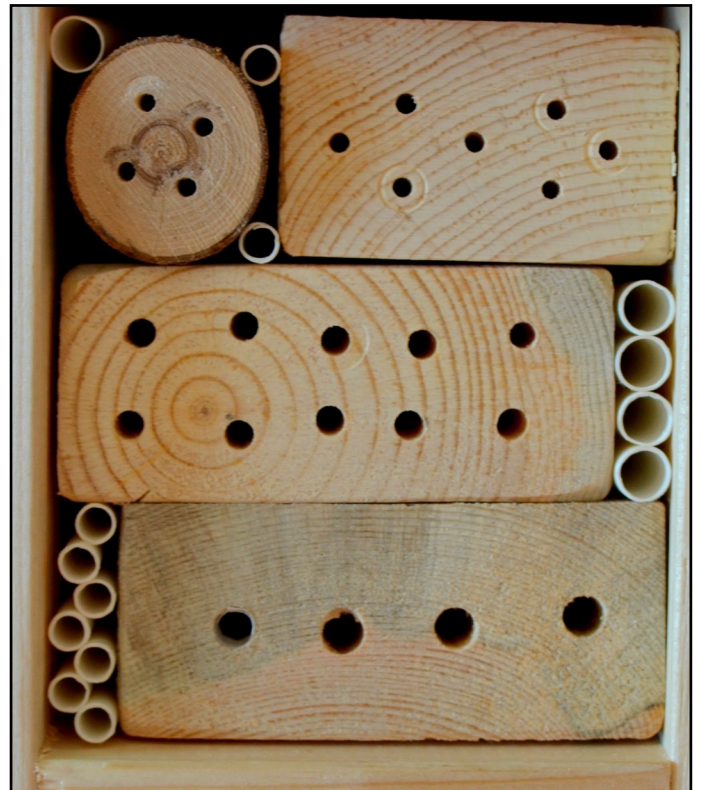
Clean or replace tunnels

Once you are sure that your hotel is empty, follow these steps. If your bee hotel contains natural stalks or paper straws, simply dispose of these after they have been used and replace them with fresh stalks.

If you have holes drilled into wood blocks, tunnels should be cleaned in the spring—keep an eye on your bee hotel in the spring to see if bees have emerged. The tunnel will no longer be capped off, but debris will remain inside the tunnel.

Clean out the tunnels with a pipe cleaner, small straw brush, or by blowing compressed air inside. You could even re-drill the tunnel to clean out the old material.

After a year or two, replace the wood blocks in your bee hotel with fresh ones.



Emergence chamber

An emergence chamber is a sealed box or container with a small hole just big enough for a bee to fit through. It should be large enough to fit your blocks inside, or you can put your whole bee hotel inside if you prefer.

Remove the blocks from your hotel in late fall or winter, and place them in the emergence chamber. Add fresh blocks, straws or stalks to your bee hotel, so it is ready for spring.

The emergence chamber can be placed outside or in an unheated garage or shed over the winter, but must be placed outside in early spring, so that the bees can exit when they hatch. When bees hatch in the spring, they will be attracted to the light coming into the dark container, and will crawl out. Leave the blocks in the emergence chamber until mid to late summer to be sure all bees have hatched.

After all the bees have emerged, clean out the tunnels in the blocks in order to reuse them again.

Overwinter

Your bee hotel is fine where it is—really! If you want, however, you can take your hotel down and put it in an unheated garage for the winter. Remember to put it back outside when temperatures are reaching above 0°C consistently, so the bees can escape!

You wouldn't want to stay in a dirty hotel, and neither do bees! Take care to clean and maintain your bee hotel each year to give it the best chance at success.



A simple emergence chamber.

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