

Bee-autiful Native Bees

Bee-hind the scenes

There are over 1,700 species of native bees in Australia, and they all play an important role within a biodiverse ecosystem. In fact, native bees in a garden are regarded as a bit of a bio-indicator – a sign that the broader habitat is healthy, functioning and buzzing! By planting flowering native (and non-weedy exotic) plants and providing shallow water sources, you can encourage native bees to your garden. But, by building a bee BnB, you may just encourage them to stay.

Single and unlikely to mingle

Unlike the introduced Honey-Bee, the vast majority of Australian native bees are actually solitary bees, preferring to forage and nest on their own, rather than forming large hives. There are no queens or workers, no honey stored in hives and, much like birds, the female bee will construct and care for an individual nest for her tiny eggs.

Building the bee 'n' bee

In and around the Dianella Microforest, there are seven different groups of native bees, including Reed Bees, Leaf Cutter Bees, Resin Bees and the beautiful Blue-Banded Bees.



Different species of native bees have different housing requirements, so it's a great idea to find out which bees might be buzzing about your area and build a B'n'B with a range of materials to suit.

Three of the easiest B'n'B designs are the "bee block", the "bee barrel" and the "bee bundle", and it's likely that most of the materials required can be found in your own home garden or shed.

To make a **bee block** for Resin Bees, all you'll need is a piece of native (or untreated hardwood) at least 15cm deep and 10cm high, a small piece of waterproof material to act as a roof and some 3-10mm drill bits. Drill holes of various diameters into one end of the hardwood – the holes need to be at least 10cm deep (don't go all the way through the wood), and on a slight upwards angle to keep the rain out. Attach the roof (with an awning over the entry holes) and you're done!

A **bee barrell** is specific for ground-nesting native bees, like Blue-Banded Bees. Simply pack old terracotta pipes or terracotta pots with moist clay soil, use a pencil to push some holes into the clay to about 10-15cm deep, and lay in a protected spot in the garden. Couldn't 'bee' easier!

A simple collection of plant pruning's and some twine are all that's required to construct a **bee bundle**, which is an ideal home for Reed and Leaf-Cutter Bees. Use plant pruning's that are at least 15cm long and are either hollow (like untreated bamboo or reeds) or have pithy stems (like hydrangeas).



Tie a bundle of these together with twine or tape and attach to a solid surface in a sheltered position in your garden.

Position is everything

When placing your B'n'B, it should ideally be facing between the north and east where the early morning sun encourages the residents to fly off and forage. Position the B'n'B between 1-2 meters off the ground, avoiding heavily shaded locations.

Bee aware

To keep native bees buzzing in your garden, plan to provide flowers year-round. Native bees adore clumps of blue, yellow and white flowers, like the Cut-Leaf Daisies (*Brachyscome* sp.) planted at the Dianella Microforest. Speak to your local nursery and see which indigenous flowering plants will work best at your place.

Avoiding the use of pesticides in the garden will also help keep native bees and other beneficial insects safe and managing pest problems or you!

