

How to create a Bee Bank



Building bee banks is a great way to help pollinators in your local area! A bee bank provides warm, sheltered patches of bare ground where solitary mining bees can nest.

Where can they be made?

Mining bees like it warm, so choose a spot that gets full sunshine and is sheltered from the prevailing wind. Align your bee bank to face south or south-east for maximum sunshine.

Building your bee bank in a crescent shape will help to trap warmth and create a variety of conditions that will benefit many different invertebrates.

Bees also need a nearby source of nectar and pollen so make sure there are lots of wildflowers nearby.

Size doesn't matter!

Bee banks can be any size from a small area in your garden to one extending along an entire field. It just depends on the amount of space available and the man power you have to build it.

In this guide we have some suggestions to create your own, but feel free to add variety when it comes to height, shape and materials to create your bank!



Did you know...
By creating a bank you will not only help pollinators such as bees but also a whole range of other invertebrates, birds and reptiles.



How to make a bee bank

Step 1- Clearing a space



Select your spot and dig up the turf, piling to one side. This dug area needs to be larger than you want to make your bank so that you create some bare ground around it (up to one metre). Try to take 15cm depth of turf so that you get most of the grass roots out.



Step 2-Start building the bank

Dig a trench in the shape you want your bank, around 30cm deep.

We recommend a crescent moon shape which maximises surface area and creates different angles and shapes.

Keep this soil in a second pile - you will need it in stage 3a to help kill off the grass.

Step 3a- Start building the banks core

Pile the removed turf from stage 1 upside-down on the core strip of the bee bank (the trench) and begin to form a crescent by extending blocks of turf out to the south facing corners.



Step 3b-

Put the soil from stage 2 over the bank to complete the core.

It doesn't matter what materials you use to build the core of your bee bank - you can use whatever materials you can find on your site. The materials that you cap your bee bank with are most important.



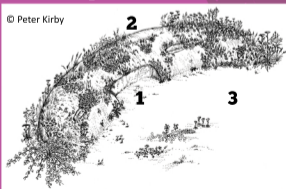
Step 4- Capping the bank

The capping material must be sufficiently deep for the bees to dig their burrows into - at least 30cm - and also should be low in nutrients. Sand or sub-soil are ideal. We would recommend using builder's sand, as the grains are not uniform in size and help the bank stay together. The capping material can be added at different depths for variety.

Use sand to cover the border around the bee bank to suppress weeds, and provide additional habitat for ground nesting bees to use. Compact the sand using the back of your spade .

Your completed bee bank

© Peter Kirby



More than one bank?

If you are creating more than one bee bank on your site, consider using different types of capping material on each one.

1 - Clifflet

Why not cut in a clifflet to create some vertical nesting space

2 - Vegetation

Maintain sparse vegetation on the bank so bare ground is always visible

3 - Bare ground

Having bare ground around the bank provides additional nesting space

You will need

Spades
Aggregate/stones for capping
Sand for capping

Looking after your bee bank



Management

To manage your bee bank, clear a section back to bare ground every year. You can weed half of the bank one year and leave the other section, then the following year swap sides - try not to clear the whole bank and try to minimise disturbance.

If you have multiple banks, clear sections on a rotational basis – the best time to do this is around February.

Additional information

On a larger area, a scattered network of banks with wildflowers in between would be an excellent way of creating a multipurpose space suitable for pollinators.

It is best not to plant on the actual bank. This keeps it open, sandy and bare for longer.



Additional nesting

Installing some nesting habitat for hole-nesting bees such as leafcutter and mason bees would also be useful. Dead wood stumps with holes drilled in them (ideally as deep as possible, at least 8cm long and 4-10mm diameter), or bundles of bamboo canes, common reed stems and herbaceous perennial stems for leafcutter and mason bees would be good. Again put these in full sunshine.

Check our other guides on helping pollinators in urban environments here:

www.buglife.org.uk