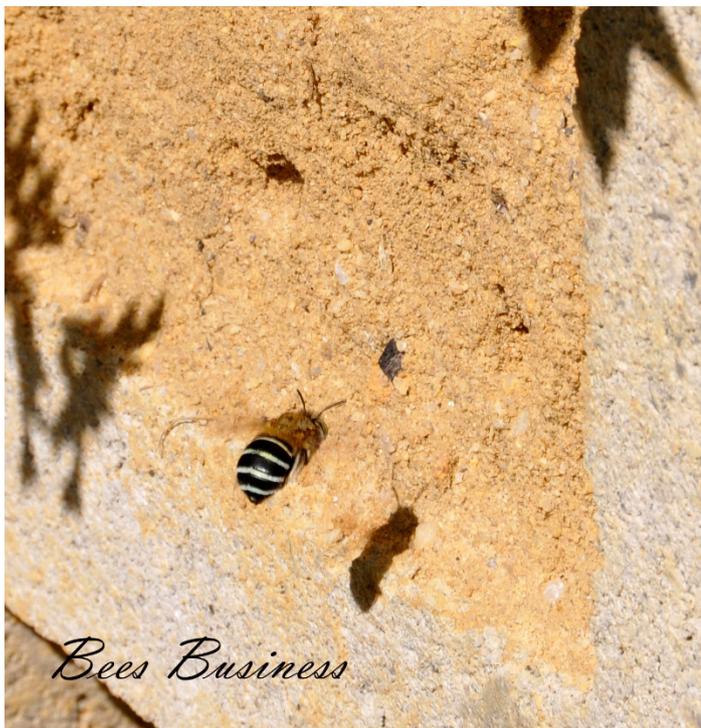


How to make rammed earth blocks for blue banded bees

Blue banded bees (*Amegilla* sp.) like to nest in short burrows, in sandy-clay types of soils. They will burrow into creek banks, river banks, dam walls, mud bricks and old mortar. They prefer to nest in areas near other bees of the same species. This is known as nesting in "aggregations" and it helps to reduce individual predation, as there is safety in numbers. These bees can be encouraged to nest in your garden.

Rammed earth bricks can be constructed and placed in a sunny position, but with some protection from the weather. It may take some time (up to two seasons) for the bees to take up residence but patience is often rewarded.



Blue banded bee entering a rammed earth block.

To make "rammed earth" blocks for blue banded bees, you will need AT LEAST three large Besser blocks. This species likes to nest in aggregations, so you need to give them enough nesting material to create an aggregation. I used several blocks for

my "wall" at home. A natural sandy-clay mix is best. You should be able to make a "sausage" of moist soil in your fist and it will hold together.

But you also need to be able to break the "sausage" easily when you push on it. The clay will hold the shape, but the sand will allow them to burrow into the earth. If it is not possible to obtain natural clay/sandy loam soil for the project, you can make up a moist (not wet) mix of premixed "sand and cement" plus "brickies sand" (1:1.5 ratio). Don't put too much cement in or it will set too hard for the bees to burrow into.



Rammed earth in Besser blocks, with roof for rain protection.

Lay the blocks, face up, on some paper to stop the mix falling out. In stages, pack the mix tightly into the bricks with a thick stick or the like. You can put 1cm deep "starter" holes in the soft mix with a pencil if you like. Let the bricks set and then arrange them in a sunny spot. If you can provide them with a "roof" all the better, but not necessary. Place them somewhere you can enjoy them. Uptake by bees is not guaranteed, but it's worth trying. I have had successful uptake in my garden.