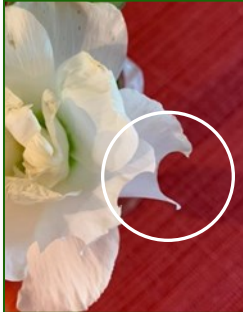




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Contributed by Pam Keeton

## THE PINKING SHEARS of BEES



A perfect crescent taken from the petal of a Lisianthus (Photo by Pam Keeton)

Leafcutter bees must be enjoying some pretty nice nests around my yard – they’ve managed to cut pieces of *Lisianthus* flower petals and Redbud leaves, leaving perfectly carved half-moon holes along the edges.

Leafcutter bees, *Megachile spp*, are native to the United States and considered important pollinators for wildflowers, fruits, vegetables and other crops, like alfalfa.

They use leaf and petal fragments to construct nest cells by laying and then gluing them together using their saliva. The result looks like a short cigar and the process is fascinating.



Leaf Cutter Bee nest. (Photo by Malcolm Tattersall via Creative Commons)

The females cut round pieces for a base and then oval pieces for the walls. Cells are usually built of leaf fragments on the outside and then lined with petal fragments. They store each cell with pollen and nectar, and lay an egg. The females then cut additional round pieces of foliage to cap the cell. Each cell is about half an inch long. This process is repeated so that the cavity is eventually filled with eight or nine cells and capped with round leaf fragments. They usually nest in soft, rotted wood or in the stems of large plants. Leafcutter bees are about the size of honeybees but darker in color. They are not aggressive and have a mild sting if handled. They are solitary and do not produce colonies like honeybees and yellow jackets. They are in one of the largest genera of bees, with more than 1500 species in over 50 subgenera. Other bees in this family include mason bees, resin bees, and carder bees.



One variety of Leaf Cutter Bee. (Image from Creative Commons).



Photo from the Nebraska Extension Office

Leafcutter bees have some natural enemies, including parasitic bees and wasps, velvet ants, and certain blister beetles. Insecticides are not effective against them.

According to several sources, cutting leaves and building nests in plants do not typically harm them, but can decrease the aesthetic value. If you notice discs cut from the edges of leaves and petals and are concerned about damage, the best way to protect plants is to cover them with cloth.

Sources of Information:

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/leafcutter-bees>. <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/insects/leafcutter-bees-5-576/#:~:text=Leafcutter%20bees%20cut%20the%20leaves%20of%20plants.%20The,important%20native%20insects%20of%20the%20western%20United%20States.> <https://completebeehives.com/leafcutter-bee-facts/>