Guide to Managing Woody Stems for Cavity-Nesting Bees

Winter Months
Leave your woody stemmed plants standing throughout the winter months to provide overwintering wildlife with food (in the form of berries and seeds) and refugia against the harsh elements.

February
The old and desiccated stems that are still standing should be cut down to 12-24” in height. This can be done with garden shears or sickle bar mower and accomplishes the following:
- The cut stems are now shorter and therefore stronger; they’ll stay upright and accessible to bees longer into the season.
- More sunlight can now penetrate through, allowing this year’s growth to get underway unencumbered.
- The cut stems now have an opening where you cut them. The native cavity-nesting bees that want to nest in those stalks can now access them.

March to Autumn
New Spring growth grows up around the old cut stems, which remain standing and ready for use by cavity-nesting bees.

Below you can see a small carpenter bee occupying one of the cut stems from the garden pictured to the left. Female bees lay their eggs inside the stems, that will hatch as larvae just days later. Males, such as the one below, sometimes guard the cavity opening.

Photography by Justin Proctor & Brooke McDonough and illustrations by Nick Garnhart