

Attracting Hummingbirds



Popular opinion has it that the only true “Hummingbird Flowers” are red, tubular flowers. Hummingbirds do not instinctively prefer red flowers, but through experience, they have discovered that these flowers hold the most nectar. Even though red flowers are the preferred source of nectar, hummingbirds will and do make regular visits to yellow, pink, purple, and even blue flowers. It is important to plant those flowers that are attractive to hummingbirds in different locations in your garden as most hummers are territorial. If you do not allow enough space for your visitors to feed in peace, they will most likely venture to other areas where they feel more welcome.

Life Cycle

Hummingbirds are “new world” birds, only occurring in the Americas. Our sole species is the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird. Adult birds spend the winter around the Gulf Coast (typically Mexico or the Yucatan) or even as far south as Panama. Males begin migrating north between one and three weeks ahead of females, and start the journey as early as January. In our area, birds typically arrive between late March and mid-April. Males set up a feeding territory and defend it enthusiastically. Females raise the young by themselves in nests built with dandelion or thistle seed fluff, secured with spider’s silk, and camouflaged with lichen. Typically, two eggs are laid and incubated for about two weeks, and young are nest-bound for about 3 weeks. Unlike other birds, hummingbird nestlings are quiet until they fledge. Adults respond to shortening daylength as their cue to begin migrating south. Most birds are gone from our area by mid-October.

Ruby-throats are estimated to live between three and five years of age. Birds get their adult plumage (red throats for males) after they are one year old. It is believed migrating birds return to the same area they were born in (or perhaps found abundant food after they fledged) every year.

Elements of the Hummingbird Garden

Hummingbirds are not dependent on our feeders for food, but they sure do make for great entertainment when they avail themselves of our offerings.

Food

Flight—especially hovering—takes up huge amounts of energy, and one of the sources of energy for hummingbirds comes from nectar. Sugar water is our approximation of flower nectar, and so long as those are the only ingredients, will suit their tastes just fine. (All flower nectar has water and sucrose; birds may also be getting some amino acids and other nutrients.) Never use honey, fruit syrup, artificial sweeteners, or any other human food for hummingbird nectar. The jury is out on the impact of red dye on the birds' health, but it certainly isn't necessary to attract them.

Always keep feeder nectar fresh—changing the solution every 2-3 days is best.

Shelter

Hiding from predators and hunkering down in inclement weather will be easier for your resident hummingbirds if you give them shelter, such as from nearby evergreens or deciduous trees and large shrubs.

The following is a list of plants that attract hummingbirds:

BOTANICAL NAME COMMON NAME

Trees, Shrubs and Vines

Abelia	Glossy Abelia
Aesculus	Buckeye
Buddleia	Butterfly Bush
Campsis	Trumpet Vine
Chaenomeles	Japanese Flowering Quince
Crataegus	Hawthorn
Hibiscus	Hardy Hibiscus
Kolkwitzia	Beauty Bush
Rhododendron	Azalea, Rhododendron
Syringa	Lilac
Viburnum	Viburnum
Vitex	Chaste Tree
Weigela	Weigela
Yucca	Spanish Dagger, Adam's Needle



Perennials

Alcea rosea	Hollyhock
Aquilegia canadensis	Columbine
Asclepias	Butterfly weed
Chelone	Turtlehead
Delphinium	Larkspur
Dianthus	Pinks
Dicentra	Bleeding Heart
Digitalis	Foxglove
Hesperis	Dame's Rocket
Heuchera	Coral Bells
Hosta (later flowering varieties)	Plantain Lily
Kniphofia	Red Hot Poker
Liatris	Gayfeather
Lilium	Lily
Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal Flower
Lupinus hybrids	Lupine
Lychnis chalcedonica	Maltese Cross
Monarda	Beebalm
Nepeta	Catmint
Penstemon	Beardtongue
Phlox maculata	Spotted Phlox
Phlox paniculata	Garden Phlox
Saponaria officinalis	Bouncing Bet, Soapwort
Scabiosa	Pincushion Flower
Verbena	Verbena

Annuals

Begonia x semperflorens	Wax Begonia
Canna x generalis	Canna
Catharanthus roseus	Vinca
Cleome hasslerana	Spider Flower
Dianthus chinensis	Annual Dianthus
Fuchsia spp.	Fuchsia
Gaillardia aristata	Annual Gaillardia
Impatiens balsamina	Balsam
Impatiens hybrids	Impatiens
Lantana camara	Lantana
Lathyrus odoratus	Sweet Pea
Lobelia erinus	Lobelia
Nicotiana alata	Flowering Tobacco
Petunia x hybrida	Petunia
Phlox drummondii	Annual Phlox
Salvia coccinea	Salvia
Salvia farinacea	Mealycup Salvia

BOTANICAL NAME COMMON NAME

Annuals (con't)

Salvia splendens Scarlet Sage
Torenia fournieri Wishbone Flower
Tropaeolum majus Nasturtium
Verbena x hybrida Verbena

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