



## Gardening for Hummingbirds

Imagine your garden from the perspective of a hummingbird. If you were one of these beautiful little birds, what would be your criteria in your search for a new home?

- \* Sources of nectar: flowers and feeders
- \* Plentiful small insects to supplement your diet and feed your young
- \* A place to rest, with a view of any flowers or feeders on your little piece of real estate
- \* Water

### Flowers and Feeders

Sometime in April to May, hummingbirds return from their southerly winter homes, so start out with some spring blooming plants to catch their attention. Make sure some of your flowers are red or pink, as these colors are most likely to draw the birds in. Likewise, a large grouping of flowers is better than individual plants placed here and there. Generally, hummingbirds seek out tubular blossoms, although they will explore other types of flowers as well. Include trees, shrubs, vines, annuals and perennials in your plan. The goal is to create a succession of attractive blooms throughout the season.

Start out with some early blooming perennials such as bleeding heart, columbine, coral bells or creeping phlox. Add some cool season annuals, too. Snapdragons and nasturtiums are good choices. Early blooming shrubs to consider include lilac, rhododendron and flowering quince. Hummingbirds are also attracted to spring-flowering trees such as crabapple.

Good perennials for mid-season bloom include bee balm, Crocosmia, beardstongue, Agastache, balloon flower, tall phlox, lily, daylily, Delphinium and Zauscherna (hardy fuchsia). Favorite annuals include impatiens, pentas, lantana, fuchsia and salvia (especially Lady in Red and Black & Blue, in my experience). Weigela and snowberry are shrubs to consider. Hummingbirds also visit hawthorn flowers. Don't forget vines, either. Trumpet vine and trumpet honeysuckle are among the favorites in this category, as well as the annual cardinal climber and scarlet runner bean.

For later season blooms, plant the perennial cardinal flower, Russian sage and butterfly bush.



Often people choose to add feeders to the garden to supplement their flowers. Many feeders are works of art, quite beautiful in their own right, and they can draw more birds in, as well as provide supplementary nectar during any gaps in flowering. Place your feeders near groups of attractive flowers, and the birds are sure to take notice. Hang feeders where you can easily observe all the action, but also high enough so the hummingbirds are out of reach of predators.

Although you can purchase hummingbird nectar, it is quite simple to make your own by dissolving one part sugar in four parts boiling water. Do not add dye to the sugar water, and let the solution cool before putting it out for the birds. Store any excess solution in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Be sure to clean out feeders thoroughly when refilling so mold does not develop. Clean and refill at least once a week, more frequently in hot weather.

### Insects

Hummingbirds need to supplement their diet with gnats and other small insects, and they also feed these to their young. If your garden contains a wide variety of plants, and you limit your use of pesticides, there should be no shortage of these protein sources.

### A Place to Rest

Hummingbirds are notorious for defending their sources of nectar. They can best do this when they have a good perching spot with full view of their flowers and feeders. They are particularly fond of small, leafless branches, wires, or even clotheslines, and can often be seen returning repeatedly to the same resting spot. Be sure to provide some open trees or tall shrubs where the birds can keep an eye on their territory, as well as some leafy trees and shrubs where they can hide.

### Water

If possible, add water to the garden. Hummingbirds enjoy birdbaths and fountains, and have been known to fly through the mist provided by lawn sprinklers, much to the delight of their human observers.



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