

# Tips For Planting A Hummingbird Garden

One good way to enjoy the company of hummingbirds is to plant a hummingbird garden. In addition to providing them a natural diet, a hummer garden is an excellent way to attract birds to your nearby feeder: since hummingbirds feed by sight on regularly-followed routes – called trap lining – their inquisitive nature will quickly lead them to investigate any possible new source of food. If you plan carefully and select a variety of plants that flower at successively later dates, you will be rewarded with happy hummers throughout the season.

Since hummers, like most birds, virtually have no sense of smell, the flowers that attract them tend to have little to no fragrance, apparently directing their resources instead toward high visibility and nectar production. Note also that cultivated hybrids often make much less nectar than wild strains. In addition to food sources, convenient perching opportunities will make your yard more hospitable to hummingbirds, since they spend around 80% of their time sitting on twigs, leaf stems, clotheslines, etc., between feedings.

**Using pesticides around hummingbird plants is a very bad idea.** Killing garden pests will also eliminate the small insects hummingbirds rely upon for protein. In addition, hummers might directly ingest pesticides sprayed onto flowers, which could sicken or kill the birds. Remember: if you wouldn't eat it yourself, don't feed it to a hummingbird!

It's not difficult to create a garden that will attract hummingbirds, but if you'd like to build a habitat in which they will happily nest and live throughout the northern summer, you need to provide them with more than a sugar-water feeder and a plant or two. An active hummingbird garden doesn't need to be large, but it will need to have all of the following key ingredients to attract and keep the attention of "nature's fairies":

**Flowers** are, of course, the key ingredient in attracting hummers to your garden. The tiny birds feed on nectar that is produced by flowers and they seem particularly attracted to plants with trumpet or tubular bright red or orange flowers.

**Provide a source of water** in the hummingbird garden. Unlike larger birds, hummingbirds will seldom take advantage of a bird bath or bowl of water. Instead, they relish in cool mists. A garden hose with a misting attachment or a small fountain that can be adjusted to a fine mist will keep them happy.

**Create perching and nesting spaces in your garden.** Hummers need shelter from predators, plus small branches for perching and resting (yes, they do perch sometimes!). By choosing a few taller bushes or trees, you can provide both.

**Add several strategically placed hummingbird feeders.** There are dozens of commercial hummingbird feeders designed to be attractive to the little wanderers. Choose feeders with bright red accents and a capacity for about 8 ounces of sugar-water. Instead of using one large feeder, place 2 to 4 of them around your garden, out of sight of each other if possible. Hummers are notoriously territorial. By providing several 'private' feeding stations, you'll increase the number of hummers that you attract.

Hummers need to feed several times an hour to maintain their high energy levels. Thus, they need access to their major natural food, a sugar-based, nectar-like solution. This is where a feeder can be used to help attract them to your garden. Here are a few hints on how to properly maintain hummingbird feeders:

1. Place the feeder in a lightly shaded area, as this helps keep the nectar solution fresher. Hot sites expand air in the feeders and increase dripping problems. Hot sun also encourages the chances of fermentation of the nectar, which is undesirable.
2. Place the feeder in a spot where cats and squirrels will not be a potential problem. Yet the feeder should be near branches or other roosts, allowing them to perch and see what's going on around them.
3. Change the solution every 3 to 4 days, particularly during warm weather. Wash feeders regularly. Keep extra nectar solution refrigerated to eliminate possible fermentation.
4. Set feeders out early in the spring and leave them in place until late fall, or until no visitors have appeared for 7 to 10 days. In some areas, such as the northwest, some species of hummingbirds will remain all winter, so continue to leave the feeder in place and provide food for them. Late season feeding will not deter their normal migration patterns.
5. Commercial hummingbird nectars come in dry packets that only require the addition of normal tap water. In addition, some brands contain added vitamins and minerals.
6. They can live for 10 to 12 years and when following the same migration patterns will remember the location of last year's feeders.

**Having trouble?** Ok, you've planned it all out with the right plants; they're flowering away and still no sign of your guests. Here are a few possible reasons:

- Dogs or cats (or restless humans) may keep hummers away
- Wet, rainy weather may keep them from being active
- Lack of nesting sites
- Nearby use of chemical insecticides
- Your neighbor's garden may be even more attractive!