

Attracting Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are some of the smallest birds in the world. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird, our only species common in the eastern-half of the U.S., weighs in at a mere 0.1-0.2 ounces. It would take 2-3 hummingbirds to weigh the same as a Black-capped Chickadee! Though small in size, they appear to be a bundle of energy as they zip through flower gardens and woodlands sipping nectar from various species of flowers.



Male Ruby-throated Hummingbird

A pesticide-free garden is the best means of attracting hummingbirds to your home. Plenty of nectar-producing flowers and a nectar feeder will provide plenty of the energy needed to fuel their activity throughout the day. Avoiding pesticide use will also ensure plenty of insect food for the hummers around your garden. Like all birds, hummingbirds set up territories based on available food supplies. If your yard and garden provides much of what they need, they're sure to stick around.

It is crucial that hummingbirds have a consistent supply of food due to the high energy demands of their flight. With wings beating anywhere from 50-80 times per second, they must consistently refuel throughout the day. The amazing number of wingbeats per second allows hummingbirds to fly in nearly any direction, in addition to hovering in place. Looking at the picture on the right, you can see the camera captured a portion of the hummingbird's amazing wingbeats. Looking carefully at the bird's left wing, the blur shows a hint of the figure-eight motion that allows them to hover in place. This is similar to how a swimmer would tread water without the use of their legs.

Nectar is a supplement to their diet of insects. Many people falsely believe hummers rely solely on their flowers or nectar feeders for food. The nectar is used as a quick energy boost to keep the metabolism cranking along at near-light speed. A number of small insects and spiders are consumed by the adults each day throughout the summer, and these protein-rich insects are also fed to nestlings to help them develop fast and strong.



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird hovering

Providing nectar and nectar-rich plants is a surefire way of attracting these feathered jewels to your yard. A simple hummingbird feeder costs less than twenty dollars and is even cheaper to fill. A homemade nectar solution can be made combining 1 part sugar to 4 parts water (ex. ¼ cup of sugar mixed into 1 cup of water). Heat the mixture to a boil and let cool before filling your feeder. Avoid buying commercial sugar solutions that contain red dye. The dye is unnecessary and is potentially harmful in the great quantities that a single hummingbird may consume. Wash and refill your feeder every couple of days in hot weather to avoid the growth of harmful mold inside the feeder.

A few of our hummingbird's favorite flowers are listed below. If you are familiar with flowers, you'll notice the red color trend, though hummingbirds are attracted to all nectar-producing flowers regardless of color. Flowers with a tube shape are particularly appealing as well. Many great options are available at local nurseries in both annual and perennial varieties.

OUR FAVORITE HUMMINGBIRD PLANTS

Bee Balm *Monarda didyma*
Butterfly Weed
Cardinal Flower *Lobelia cardinalis*
Columbine *Aquilegia sp.*
Coral Bells *Huechera sanguinea*
Flowering Tobacco *Nicotiana glauca*
Four o'clocks *Mirabilis jalapa*
Foxglove *Digitalis sp.*
Nasturtium *Tropaeolum ajus*
Phlox *Phlox sp.*
Scarlet Sage *Salvia splendens*
Trumpet Creeper *Campsis radicans*

MAKE IT COUNT!

Consider turning your love of feeding and observing birds into scientific data. Participate in Project Feeder Watch or the Great Backyard Bird Count each winter, or submit bird sightings anytime of the year to eBird.org!