

Attracting Hummingbirds

Hummingbird Facts

There are two common species of hummingbirds in our area. The Rufous hummingbirds return to the Northwest lowlands from Mexico in early spring and migrates south in late summer. Anna's hummingbirds are year-round residents in some areas west of the Cascades. They are more frequently sighted in urban areas in the winter months.

The tiny nest (golf ball sized) made of plant parts, mosses and lichens held together by spider webs blends in so well that they are extremely difficult to spot in the wild. The nest is often in the lower branches of trees and shrubs. The female hummingbird incubates one to two eggs for 2 to 3 weeks. The young hummingbirds leave the nest in about 25 days.

Hummingbirds expend a lot of energy. They have a fast heartbeat and high body temperature to maintain. They must feed every 10-15 minutes throughout the daylight hours. A hummingbird can consume 2/3 of its body weight each day. Their diet consists of nectar from flowers, tree sap, insects and pollen. The insects and pollen provide needed protein for muscles. In cooler climates like that of Western Washington, hummingbirds gather food in their tiny crops before dark. They slowly digest this stored food throughout the night. They also lower their body temperature and heart rate at night to save energy and ensure that the food supply stored in their crops lasts till morning.

Feeding

Hummingbirds seem to have a memory for food sources. There are two ways you can add your backyard to their feeding territory.

1. Feeders

Special feeder filled with a sugar solution.

Feeders can help birds get through cold spells or periods when you have no nectar flowers blooming.

- You can put out your feeder in early March.
- The sugar solution should be 1 part white table sugar and 4 parts water. Boil the solution for about 30 seconds to retard mold growth and let it cool before using.
- **Do not use honey, brown sugar or artificial sweeteners.** The honey encourages molds that contain botulism toxins and will kill hummingbirds. Artificial sweeteners have no calories and the hummers may actually starve to death.
- Dye, food coloring and flavorings are considered **unsafe**.
- Clean the feeder every 3-5 days by rinsing with hot water and if necessary a little vinegar (no soap). Use a bottlebrush to completely remove any mold or yeast

Placement: Hummingbirds are territorial and fight to defend their food sources. This affects how many hummingbirds you will attract and how long the nectar stays fresh. Male hummingbirds will defend multiple feeders that are in the open. By putting the feeders in or near cover such as bushes and out of sight of each other, you will get more hummingbirds at the feeders. The nectar mix will remain fresh longer in the shade.

2. Planting known hummingbird nectar plants in an existing garden.

Hummingbirds prefer natural sources of nectar to solutions. Use native trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Our local wildlife has evolved in association with our local native plants. There is a mutual need or interdependence between plants and hummingbirds. As the hummer pushes its bill inside the flower to lick the nectar it needs, it rubs against stamens and pistils. This pollen is then deposited on the next flower. The flower requires a pollinator. The bird requires a source of high-energy nectar.

Nectar Flowers

The perfect hummingbird flower has long, tube shaped blooms. Single flowers usually have more nectar and the nectar is more accessible than double flowers. The flowers should be widely spaced along the stem to accommodate whirring wings since the hummingbird does not land to feed. Native wildflowers fit all of these requirements. When your garden features plants that bloom from March to August it provides a consistent source of food throughout the time that hummingbirds visit our area. Provide some of these Pacific Northwest native plants and you will have happy hummers in your backyard.

Native Nectar Plants

Note: the 'spp' After the genus name means that there are multiple species of that genus that are considered good hummingbird plants.

Trees:

Bitter Cherry (*Prunus emarginata*)
Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*)
Dogwood (*Cornus* spp)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp)
Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*)

Mt. Ash (*Sorbus* spp)
Oak (*Quercus* spp)
Oregon Ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*)
Pacific Crabapple (*Malus fusca*)
Willow (*Salix* spp)

Shrubs & Vines:

Cascade Oregon Grape (*Mahonia nervosa*)
Birchleaf Spiraea (*Spiraea betulifolia*)
Elderberry (*Sambucus* spp)
Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*)
Hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*)
Indian Plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*)
Kinnikinnik (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)
Mock Orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*)
Ocean Spray (*Holodiscus discolor*)
Red Huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*)
Red-flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)
Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)
Tall Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)
Thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*)
Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*)
Twinberry (*Lonicera involucrate*)
Wild Azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*)
Wild Gooseberry (*Ribes* spp)
Wild Lilac (*Ceanothus* spp)
Wild Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* spp)
Wild Rose (*Rosa* spp)

Native Wildflower Perennials:

Blanketflower (*Gaillardia* spp)
Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra formosa*)
Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium* spp)
Brodiaea (*Brodiaea* spp)
Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)
Camas (*Camassia* spp)
Chocolate Lily (*Fritillaria lanceolata*)
Clarkia (*Clarkia* spp)
Cluster Lily (*Brodiaea congesta*)
Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)
Delphinium (*Delphinium* spp)
Fawn Lily (*Erythronium* spp)
Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*)
Gayfeather (*Liatris* spp)
Goat's Beard (*Aruncus* spp)
Goldenrod (*Solidago* spp)
Hairy Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*)

Hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*)
Harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*)
Harsh Paintbrush (*Castilleja hispida*)
Iris (*Iris* spp)
Lupine (*Lupinus* spp)
Monkeyflower (*Mimulus* spp)
Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*)
Paintbrush (*Castilleja* spp)
Penstemon (*Penstemon* spp)
Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*)
Sea Thrift (*Armeria maritima*)
Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)
Sitka Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)
Trout Lily (*Erythronium oregonum*)
Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria* spp)

Information compiled by Susan Taylor, a Bellingham Backyard Habitat Mentor, gardener, and wildlife observer.