Attract More Hummingbirds, How to

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

The return of migrating hummingbirds is a much-awaited gift of nature for bird enthusiasts. Though they eat small insects for protein, hummingbirds also rely heavily on flower and prepared nectar for their energy needs. You might be able to successfully attract them to a backyard feeder with a proper combination of timing, consistency, and cleanliness.

Hang nectar feeders about 5-10 days before the average spring arrival date in your area. This ensures hummingbirds will see them, take a drink, and possibly stay the whole season in your neighborhood. Remove your nectar feeder a couple weeks after you see your last visitors in the fall.

Strength in Numbers - Hummingbirds, especially males, can be very territorial when it comes to nectar sources, and may chase away any competitors that try to use your feeders. The best way to deal with the occasional greedy customer is to offer several feeders, in different locations. This gives timid hummingbirds a place to feed if a "bully" is overprotective of one feeder.

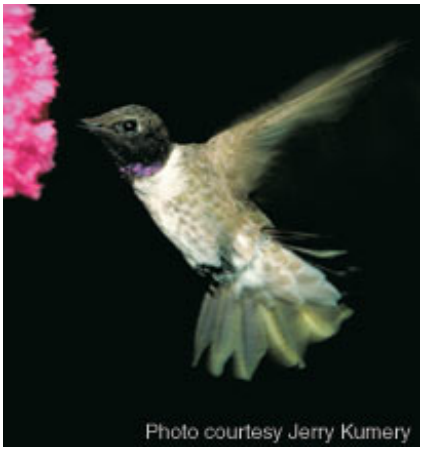
Photo courtesy Jerry Kumery

Placement is paramount: Feeders should be high enough to deter domestic predators, but in plain sight, near flowers or windows, for a good view. Hummingbirds also like to have a branch nearby to observe a feeder from before approaching it.

Nectar: Use Sugar, Not Honey - If you mix your own nectar, the widely-recommended mix is 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. Using more sugar than this can dehydrate hummingbirds. Cane sugar contains the same kind of sugar birds get from flower nectar, so it is the only sweetener recommended. Do not use

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honey, molasses, or artificial sweeteners.

Keeping Feeders Clean - Perhaps the most important aspect of hummingbird feeding is feeder cleanliness. Hummingbirds are very particular and will easily abandon a neglected feeder for a cleaner alternative. Depending on the outside temperature, nectar can spoil in as little as 2-5 days, causing fermentation and mold growth. You can ensure safety for your visiting hummingbirds by offering an amount that can be consumed within a few days. This way, you're prompted to wash the feeder when you take it down to refill. Cleaning is relatively easy. Simply use a mix of hot, soapy water and our Feeder Mop to get hard-to-reach areas. Scrub stubborn spots with a bottle brush or similar cleaning tool. To keep nectar fresh longer, move feeders out of direct sunlight in extremely warm temperatures.

Feeder Selection - Hummingbirds, as well as orioles, are attracted to the bright red or orange coloring on parts of nectar feeders. If your feeder has no red or orange coloring, simply tie red ribbons to the hanging wire. They'll find it. Dish-style feeders often have perches so you can get a rare, motionless view of hummingbirds feeding. Gravity-fed, bottle-style feeders are generally known for their ease of filling and cleaning. Some of the newer feeder styles have a straw-like feeding tube, which does not offer pests, like wasps and bees, a place to land. There are more and more artistic styles to choose from including glass milk bottle-style, antique bottle style, and glass tube-style, which beautify any garden and backyard areas.

Orioles Love Nectar, too - Orioles, like hummingbirds, also appreciate nectar offerings. They have been found feeding from hummingbird feeders, but you can purchase a nectar feeder especially for them. They'll also dine on fresh oranges, halved and placed on a skewer feeder, as well as jelly. A combination jelly/fruit feeder is ideal for these spring visitors.

Tips for no-drip nectar

The following tricks will help you prevent leaks in stopper-style gravity feeders.

- Stopper-style feeders stay leak-free only if they are kept airtight. If air bubbles get in, nectar can trickle out.
- Place the stopper firmly inside the feeder, leaving about 1/4 of its length outside the feeder.
- The placement of the straw or feeding tube through the stopper is important, as well. Each tube must be pushed completely through the stopper so that it is sticking out the end of the stopper inside the feeder.

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See photo above.

Recommended Products

HummZinger Feeder

Colibri Hummingbird Feeder

HummZinger Jewel Box Window Feeder

24 oz Glass Hummingbird Feeder

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